

Choosing Issues for PE: Worksheet (Rev. Sept 2011)

This worksheet should be completed for each issue referred for PE. Answers should then be transferred to **Choosing Issues for PE: Tracking Tool**. Together, the worksheet and tracking tool provide a record of issues referred for PE, and can be used to explain decisions about “appropriateness” in a rational and organized manner to the ethics leadership body or other leaders.

APPROPRIATENESS FOR AN ISSUES APPROACH

1. **Date that the issue came to the attention of the PE team?**

2. **What is the source of the issue?**

3. **Describe the possible ethics issue.**

Provide a description of the issue: who, what, where, when, how much or how often?

► “Red Flag” Questions ◀

4. Does this issue require immediate attention or urgent action by leadership?

Does the issue involve a situation that includes, for example, risk of harm to patients or staff; wilful disregard of law or policy, intentionally unsafe acts or unaddressed personnel issues?

Yes	STOP Refer to ethics leadership body or other leaders.
No	Move to the next element for assessing appropriateness.
Unsure	STOP Assess whether immediate action is required.
Explain:	

5. Does this issue represent a simple problem with an obvious solution?

Yes	STOP This issue does not require ISSUES to improve. Just Do It!
No	Proceed to the next element for assessing appropriateness.
Explain:	

6. Other program or service responsible for this issue

Does another program or service have oversight responsibilities for the issue? Does this issue involve a clinical, business, or research process that another office “owns” or is directly responsible for?

Yes	STOP Contact the program or service that has oversight responsibility or that “owns” the process.
No	Move to the next element for assessing appropriateness.
Unsure	STOP Determine whether another program has oversight responsibilities or “owns” the process.
Explain:	

► **Best Ethics Practice** ◀

7. Is there an ethics domain related to this issue? (For a listing of the ethics domains and topics, please refer to the IntegratedEthics website at <http://www.ethics.va.gov> or <http://vaww.ethics.va.gov>)

Yes No

If yes, Domain:	
If no, STOP	If the PE team cannot, at a minimum, identify an ethics domain, then the issue probably does not suggest an ethics quality gap but, rather, a technical or service gap.
Comment:	

8. Is there an Ethics Topic related to this issue?

Yes No

NOTE: If your issue does not appear to fit any of the Ethics Topics listed under the Ethics Domain, designate “Other,” which is the last sub-category under each Ethics Domain, and briefly describe the topic in the space provided.

If yes, Topic:	
If no, fill in “Other”	
Comment:	

9. Is the PE team certain that the practice described in the ethics issue is inconsistent with prevailing ethical standards, norms, or expectations?

Yes No Unsure

Can the team identify specific and widely accepted ethical standards (e.g., policy, professional codes of ethics, accreditation standards), norms, or expectations for the practice?

Resp.	(√)	Next step
Yes		Identify or describe the ethical standard, norm, or expectation and whether the practice is inconsistent with
No		STOP The issue may not be appropriate for ISSUES
Unsure		STOP Consult with ethics program leadership or the ethics consultation service to clarify if the practice is inconsistent with ethical standards, norms, or expectations.
Explain:		

Select the standards below that are related to this issue, and cite their sources, if known.
 (Choose all that apply)

Common Sources of Ethical Standards	Check (√)	Source of Ethical Standard (e.g., VHA Handbook 1004.01 Informed Consent Treatments and Procedure)
Accreditation standards		
Consensus statements or white papers from professional societies		
Executive directives or other senior management guidance		
Institutional policies		
Professional codes of ethics		
Precedents from case law		
Statutes		
Other—describe source		

NOTE: If the PE team can identify an ethics domain, ethics topic, and a widely accepted ethical standard, norm, or expectation that applies to the practice, then the issue, at least on its face, suggests an ethics quality gap.

► **Current Ethics Practice** ◀

10. Is there measurable data (i.e., qualitative or quantitative information that can be counted or expressed as a number or percent) about current practice?

Resp.	(√)	Next step
Yes		Proceed to Q. 12.
No		Proceed to Q. 11.
Unsure		STOP Determine whether data on current practice is available and then proceed to Q. 11.
Explain:		

11. If you don't have measurable data about current practice, is it easily collected?

Resp.	(√)	Next step
Yes		Proceed to Q. 12.
No		STOP This issue may be outside the scope of what the PE team can address.
Unsure		STOP Determine whether data about current practice can be easily collected.
Explain:		

NOTE: If data on current practice is available or easily collected, the issue can be referred for PE Prioritization.

12. Describe the preliminary improvement goal (i.e., the desired outcome of the improvement process, including the direction of change).

13. Is this issue appropriate for ISSUES?

Resp.	(√)	Next step
Yes		Proceed to prioritization of ethics issue.
No		Close feedback loop, communicate rationale to source of issue.
Unsure		Bring to the ethics leadership body.

Now you will move on to Prioritization for a PE ISSUES approach.

Prioritization for a PE ISSUES Approach

All ethics issues that were assessed as appropriate for an ISSUES approach now need to be prioritized. This portion of the handout is intended to:

1. Guide you through a systematic process for prioritization, using a rating scale of High (H), Medium (M), and Low (L)
2. Ensure that consistent criteria are applied to all ethics issues
3. Help you determine which ethics issues should be recommended to your ethics leadership body (e.g., in VHA, the Integrated Ethics Council) for approval to move forward

PE teams and ethics leadership teams may add to these criteria if something of local importance is missing.

14. Alignment with Strategic Goals

To what extent does addressing the ethics issue align with the organization’s strategic goals, priorities, or initiatives, including the ethics programs?

NOTE: As a rule of thumb, strategic priorities represent values that are important to the organization, and typically, leaders support activities that advance these priorities. If you aren’t sure what your organization’s strategic priorities are, your organization’s senior and middle managers should be able to help you identify them.

Alignment with Strategic Goals, Priorities, or Initiatives:	High / Med / Low <i>circle one</i>
Rationale for Rating:	

15. Level of Risk

What level of risk does the ethics issue pose to the organization if left unaddressed?

NOTE: Risks to the organization can take many forms including legal exposure; financial exposure; loss of reputation; and loss of trust by patients, staff, the organization's board of directors, third-party payers, or the public. In VHA, public accountability is ensured through Congress.

Level of Risk:	High / Med / Low <i>circle one</i>
Rationale for Rating:	

16. Impact on Patient and/or Employee

What level of impact will addressing the ethics issue have on patient and/or employee satisfaction?

NOTE: Prioritization should be given to resolving ethics issues that benefit patients or employees directly, thereby improving their experiences and overall satisfaction.

Level of Impact on Patient and/or Employee Satisfaction:	High / Med / Low <i>circle one</i>
Rationale for Rating:	

17. Volume or Scope of Effect

If this ethics issue is addressed, how many people, units, etc., will be impacted by the resulting quality improvements? Would you consider this scope to be high, medium, or low?

NOTE: In general, a broader scope of effect is necessary to justify a comprehensive improvement effort.

Volume/Scope of Effect:	High / Med / Low <i>circle one</i>
Rationale for Rating:	

18. Resources Required to Improve

How substantial are the resources required to improve ethics quality for this specific ethics issue? Is the anticipated outcome sufficient to justify the expenditure of resources?

NOTE: Many highly significant ethics issues can be addressed economically—and in general these are the types of ethics quality gaps PE is set up to address.

Level of Resource Required to Improve:	High / Med / Low <i>circle one</i>
Rationale for Rating:	

19. Likelihood of Success

How likely is it that the PE team can succeed in tackling this ethics issue and achieving the desired outcome within the desired time frame?

NOTE: If the PE team believes the chance of success is remote, the project should not be undertaken unless the barriers to achieving the desired outcome are removed. This may require leadership involvement to assist in removing barriers, negotiate time frames, or decide whether more resources can be brought to bear to achieve the outcome.

Likelihood of Success:	High / Med / Low <i>circle one</i>
Rationale for Rating:	

20. Refer for Ethics Leadership Approval

Should the ethics issue be referred to the ethics leadership body (e.g., in VHA, the IE Council) for approval to move forward?

Resp.	(√)	Next Step
Yes		The PE team has judged that the ethics issue is a high priority and will recommend that it be addressed using an ISSUES approach.
No		Close feedback loop, communicate rationale to source of ethics issue.
Unsure		Bring to the ethics leadership body and share concerns.