



# Integrated Ethics Program Officer's Desk Reference

- IE Program Overview
- Essential IE Program Operations
- Model IE Council Agenda
- IE Essential Training Checklist



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

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Veterans Health Administration  
National Center for Ethics in Health Care



*IntegratedEthics® Program Officer's Desk Reference (2020)*

National Center for Ethics in Health Care, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

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# Welcome to IntegratedEthics®!

Congratulations on your appointment as your facility's IntegratedEthics® Program Officer (IEPO)! An effective ethics program is essential to health care quality, and you and other IEPOs are essential to the success of IntegratedEthics (IE) in VA. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of IEPOs since the implementation of IE in 2007, your ethics consultation (EC) services are providing invaluable services to Veteran patients, families, and staff by helping resolve ethical concerns and alleviate moral distress. Your preventive ethics (PE) teams are taking charge of ethics quality gaps and making changes that tangibly improve the quality of VA health care. Your ethical leadership (EL) activities are helping leaders foster an environment and culture that is conducive to ethical practice. You and your IE councils have driven these changes through conscientious program management and a steadfast commitment to ethics in VA.

The National Center for Ethics in Health Care IE team knows your time is valuable. We also know that you value ethics. We realize what a challenge it is to be an effective manager of IE when you have so many competing demands on your time. One response to this dilemma is the *IntegratedEthics Program Officer's Desk Reference*. This reference is designed to help you be more efficient by collecting essential materials in one place and providing timelines and planning tools for use throughout the year. It brings together the best information, strong practices, and learning from several years of interactions with field staff. It also includes highlights from Improvement Forum (IF) calls and core concepts gleaned from the IE primers. Ideally, this reference will help make your role as IEPO more satisfying and make your program more effective at achieving the goal of ethics quality. It is designed to provide new and current IEPOs with:

- general information about the IE program and essential operations;
- a list of critical activities, steps on how to complete them, and when these steps should be taken;
- a collection of useful materials, tools, and resources related to IE and the National Center for Ethics in Health Care.

If you are new to IE or the role of IEPO, this desk reference will give you a solid understanding of the program and will help you pick up where your predecessor left off. New IEPOs should turn to the [IEPO Quick-start Guide](#) for assistance with transitioning into your new role. In the guide, you'll learn about key responsibilities and essential first steps as a new IEPO.

One theme of this guide is that IEPOs should always collaborate with other IE staff to further the work of the program. The number and variety of activities listed in this desk reference are not intended to be performed by one person alone. With support from your EL coordinator and members of your IE council, you will be able to coordinate and monitor the many activities of this program. Before you turn to the contents, the NCEHC IE team would like to express our sincere gratitude for all the hard work that you do to help raise the level of ethics quality in VHA. Please don't hesitate to send questions to [VHAethics@va.gov](mailto:VHAethics@va.gov)

# How to Use the IEPO Desk Reference

- **Review the Desk Reference** if you are a new IEPO, to orient your successor if you are vacating the role, and prior to a new fiscal year for annual planning. This reference is designed to provide ready access to critical program elements. Ultimately, it is your key to coordinating a successful IE program. It is not designed to be read in one sitting.
- **Note the special IE tools** developed to help promote IE program elements or processes throughout the desk reference. For example, the stand-alone companion tool, the [IEPO Desk Reference Consolidated Activities Table](#), brings each critical success factor activity table into one spreadsheet, (see [Section III, IE Program Operations](#)).
- **Look for program management tips and best practices** collected from your colleagues in the field throughout the document. For example:

## Tip

New IEPOs should establish a relationship with a more experienced IEPO in their VISN to help understand and carry out the responsibilities of this role, especially if a predecessor is not available. Contact your VISN IE Point of Contact ([Key IE Staff](#)) to identify a suitable candidate and to help establish this connection.

- **The IEPO Desk Reference** will be updated regularly. Please help us improve it by forwarding new ideas or suggestions about IE content, or technical problems such as broken links, to [VHAethics@va.gov](mailto:VHAethics@va.gov).
- **For individual support** send an email to [VHAethics@va.gov](mailto:VHAethics@va.gov).
- **Abbreviations:**

AES	All Employee Survey
ECC	Ethics Consultation Coordinator
ECSPAT	Ethics Consultation Service Proficiency Assessment Tool
ELC	Ethical Leadership Coordinator
IE	IntegratedEthics
IEC	IntegratedEthics Council
IF Call	Improvement Forum Call
IEAB	IntegratedEthics Advisory Board
IEPO	IntegratedEthics Program Officer
IEWeb	IntegratedEthics Web (virtual workspace software app)
NCEHC	National Center for Ethics in Health Care
PEC	Preventive Ethics Coordinator
POC	Point of Contact (e.g., VISN IE POC)

# I. National Center for Ethics in Health Care

The National Center for Ethics in Health Care (NCEHC), in VHA Central Office, serves as VHA's authoritative resource for addressing the complex ethical issues that arise in health care, including issues relating to clinical, organizational, and research ethics. Pursuant to [VHA Directive 1004: National Center for Ethics in Health Care](#), NCEHC is tasked with establishing, interpreting, and communicating ethical standards in health care and promoting practices within VA and nationwide that are consistent with those standards. We work collaboratively with VA senior leadership, field facilities, and program offices to fulfill these responsibilities.

IntegratedEthics® is a key program to promote ethics quality in health care in each VHA facility. Ethics quality is an essential component of health care quality. In a highly ethical organization, practices within that organization are consistent with widely accepted standards, norms, and expectations for ethical practice. Organizational literature tells us that ethics quality correlates with other important indicators of organizational health, including higher patient satisfaction, higher overall staff satisfaction, lower usage of sick leave by staff, lower nursing turnover, and lower number of retirements (see [A Brief Business Case for Ethics](#)). For more than a decade, IE has been driving change in ethics quality across the VA health care delivery system. By building a strong local IE program, IEPOs help to achieve the NCEHC vision: *Veterans, their loved ones, and staff experience the Veterans Health Administration as a highly ethical organization.*

## Why Ethics Matters

Throughout our health care system, VA patients, family members, and staff face difficult and potentially life-altering decisions every day—in clinics, cubicles, and council meetings. In the day-to-day business of health care, uncertainty or conflicts about values—that is, ethical concerns—inevitably arise.

Individuals and organizations must each respond effectively to ethical concerns. When ethical concerns are not resolved, the result can be errors or unnecessary and potentially costly decisions that are bad for patients, staff, the organization, and society at large. When employees perceive that they have no place to bring their ethical concerns, the result can be moral distress—a recognized factor in professional burnout—which is a major cause of staff turnover, especially among nurses.

A healthy ethical environment and culture doesn't just improve employee morale; it also helps to enhance productivity and improve efficiency. Organizations that support doing the right thing, doing it well, and doing it for the right reasons tend to outperform other organizations in measures such as customer satisfaction and employee retention. Failure to maintain an effective ethics program can seriously jeopardize an organization's reputation, its bottom line, and even its survival. For more information and resources related to ethics in VHA, review the IE primers located in the [Index of IE Resources](#).

## II. IE Program Overview

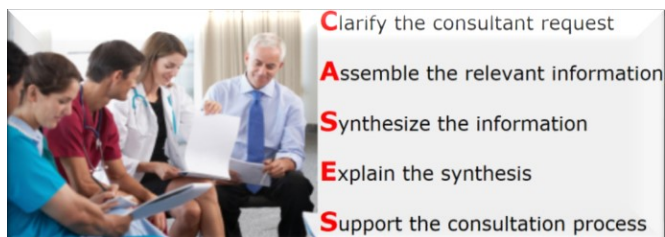
IntegratedEthics® is a dynamic, systems-focused model for managing ethics in health care. It was developed by VAM National Center for Ethics in Health Care and first deployed across VHA in 2007. It establishes a national, standardized, comprehensive approach to ensure that ethical practices are based on both rules *and* values. The goal of IE is to improve ethics quality, which can be depicted as an iceberg. IntegratedEthics improves ethics quality by targeting the three levels of quality—decisions and actions, systems and processes, and environment and culture—through three core functions: ethics consultation, preventive ethics, and ethical leadership.





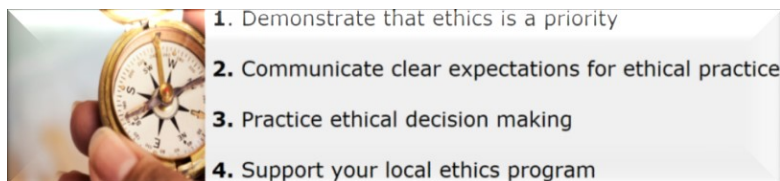
IntegratedEthics offers practical, user-friendly tools to help health care leaders and staff:

- Respond to ethical questions at the level of actions and decisions through [ethics consultation](#). Ethics consultation improves health care quality by helping staff members, patients, and families resolve ethical concerns.



Ethics consultation uses the **CASES** approach to offer consultants a practical, systematic and standardized approach to EC. The **ethics consultation coordinator (ECC)** oversees the Ethics Consultation Service (ECS) and ongoing consultation activities to ensure the quality of consultation services.

- Address ethics quality gaps at the level of systems and processes by applying a quality improvement approach in [preventive ethics](#). Preventive ethics combines quality improvement techniques with ethical analysis to improve quality by identifying, prioritizing, and addressing ethics quality gaps on a systems level. Preventive ethics uses **PE projects** to address an ethics quality gap. The preventive ethics coordinator (PEC) oversees the PE function and ongoing PE activities to ensure the quality of PE functions.
- Foster a strong ethical environment and culture through [ethical leadership](#). Leaders influence their organization's environment and culture in virtually everything they do. Ethical leadership means fostering an ethical environment and culture that makes it easy for employees to "do the right thing." IntegratedEthics draws insights from ethics and management to identify behaviors that leaders can use to support ethical practices in their facility, in their VISN, and across VHA. The **Ethical Leadership Coordinator (ELC)** is responsible for the overall success of IE in the



facility and chairs the facility IE Council. The ELC models ethical practices, champions the program, and works to create and sustain a strong

ethical environment and culture. The [EL compass](#) is intended to help leaders orient themselves to their unique responsibilities and to practice specific behaviors that promote an ethical environment and culture.

The **IE Program Officer (IEPO)** directs the day-to-day operations of the program and acts as executive officer for the facility IE council. Each VHA medical center is required to

appoint an IEPO to coordinate IE activities. The IEPO serves as spokesperson for the program, builds support for the program, monitors program performance, and assists the IE council in evaluating and continuously improving the program. The IEPO and the IE council support the ELC. The IEPO is responsible for:

- Serve as spokesperson and point-of-contact for the program
- Coordinate IE Council meetings and activities
- Build visibility and support for the program
- Monitor IE staffing and expertise
- Monitor IE program performance and continuous improvement activities including:
  - Completion of quarterly IE program achievement requirements
  - Completion of IE Facility Workbook
  - Implementation and adherence to health care ethics policies
- Manage IEWeb permissions

Specific and detailed IEPO responsibilities can be found in [VHA Directive 1004.06: IntegratedEthics® \(IE Directive\)](#). IEPOs should also be familiar with the responsibilities of other IE colleagues such as the ECC, PEC, and ELC to better understand their roles in the program.

## IE Council

The **IE council** is the facility-level structural element of the IE program. It is charged with:

- overseeing and supporting management of the facility IE program;
- reviewing and participating in development of ethics-related policies, such as policies released by NCEHC;
- coordinating ethics-related activities throughout the facility and ensuring information regarding ethics standards, ethics activities, the facility IE program, ethics resources, and education on how to recognize ethical concerns is provided to all facility staff;
- communicating ethics standards through education and awareness activities; and

- reviewing and making recommendations for assignment of staff to designated IE positions (i.e., IEPO, ECC, PEC, ethics consultants, PE team members, and IE council membership) according to procedures established by the facility director.

The IE council, which should meet at least every two months, is chaired by the ELC. The IEPO serves as the executive officer. Membership includes facility leaders and senior staff who regularly encounter ethical concerns and are engaged in improving ethics quality at the facility. Membership, which may vary according to the existing governance structure and needs of the facility and its associated sites of care delivery, typically includes: the ELC, the IEPO, the ECC, the PEC, and senior leaders representing key functions or offices in the facility (e.g., executive leadership team member or equivalent, quality management, patient safety, compliance, clinical services, chaplaincy, human resources, fiscal, learning, research).

The IE council is the source for two levels of IE integration, since it brings the three core IE functions together in one place *and* is the central organizing structure for managing the ethics program and related activities throughout the facility. The council also promotes

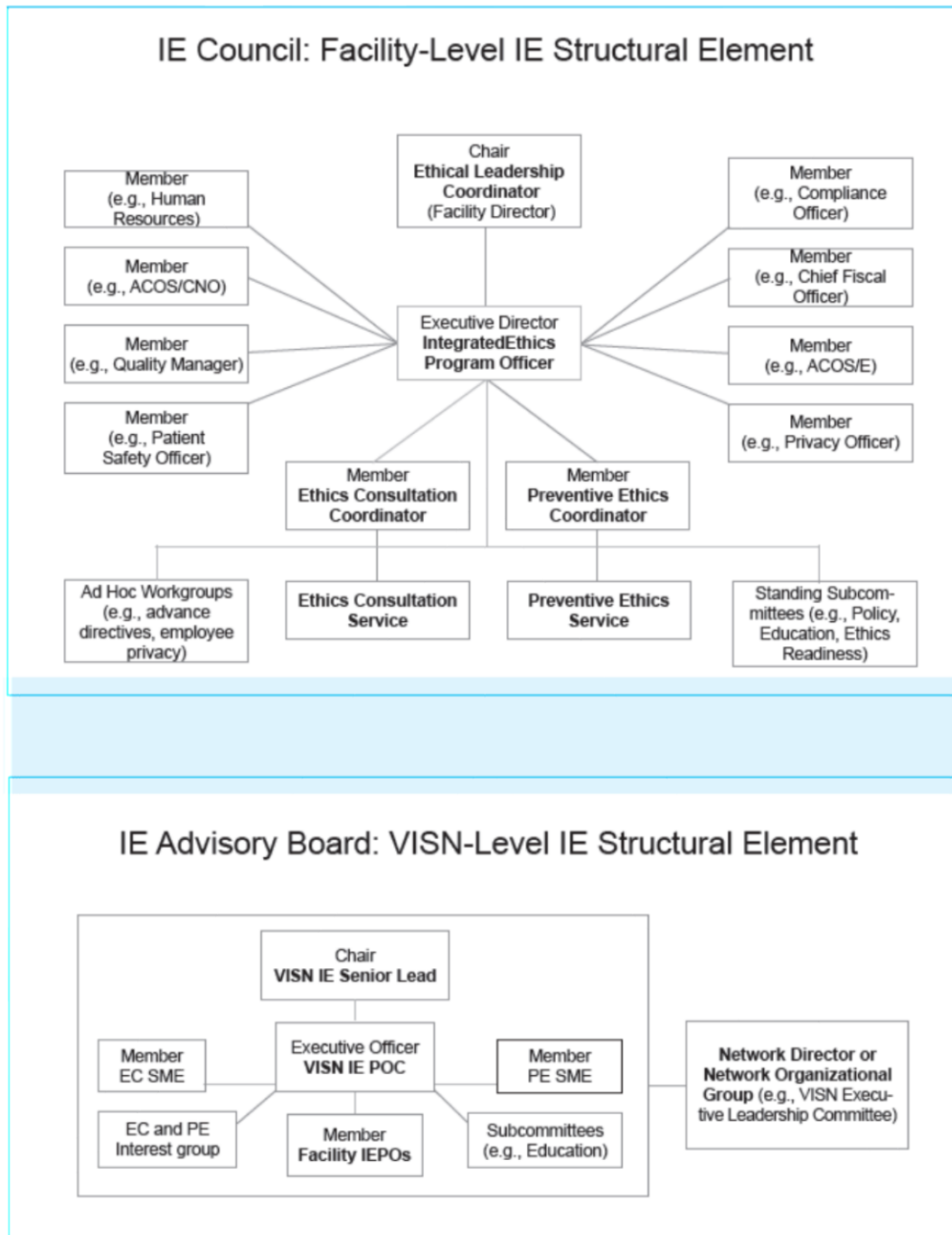
integration across the VISN, since it is the key facility link to the VISN IE advisory board (IEAB).



The VISN IEAB is the VISN-level structural element of the IE program which implements IE at the VISN and supports the VISN director's oversight of IE deployment and integration throughout all facilities in the VISN. Members of the VISN IEAB typically include the IEPO from

each facility, representatives from each of the three core functions of IE, and other staff as designated by the VISN director. The IEAB is charged with ensuring that IE programs are fully deployed and integrated throughout all facilities in the VISN; facilitating VISN-wide

strategic relationships and mutual support among IE staff; and coordinating ethics-related and IE program activities across facilities in the VISN.



### III. IE Program Operations

This section is your road map for IE program operations. In complex organizations, certain factors help to ensure that a service will achieve its goals. This section describes factors that organizational literature tells us are critical for program success. As the IEPO, you and the IE council that you direct are responsible for achieving IE goals in your facility. It is your job, with the help of your council, to coordinate and/or perform activities to support each of the following critical success factors: *staffing and expertise, integration, leadership engagement and support, policy, resources, access, accountability, organizational learning, and evaluation and improvement*. In each of the following sections (A– I), this reference lays out **what you need to know, what you need to do, and when and how often you need to do it** to achieve each factor. Each section also contains an activity table that lists key actions and the frequency that they should be addressed. A stand-alone companion tool, the [IEPO Desk Reference Consolidated Activities Table](#), brings each critical success factor activity table into one spreadsheet. Also, note that there is some overlap of content across each of the following sections, so you may be pointed to more than one section for certain topics. To gain full benefit of this desk reference, collaborate with your IE council to ensure that you are addressing these factors and any barriers you may encounter in achieving them. You may also wish to add discussions of the factors and related activities as regular agenda items for your IE council meetings (see [Section IV, Model IE Council Agenda](#)).

#### A. Staffing and Expertise

##### What You Need to Know

Staffing and expertise are related. Well-selected, well-trained, and well-supported IE program staff members are more likely to stay in their positions than those who are uninterested, untrained, and unsupported. IEPOs and IE councils should focus on staffing the program with interested individuals whose IE duties, including education and training, will be supported by their supervisors. IE functions should also be adequately staffed to manage workload, especially during absences, and to ensure that qualified staff move into vacant positions. When and how often you and your IE council perform staffing and expertise activities is largely dependent on the size and activity levels of your facility and IE program. This should be an IE council agenda item that is routinely monitored.

A good place to begin the discussion of staffing and expertise is with succession planning. Succession planning is the continual process of forecasting IE position turnover, identifying and recruiting possible successors, and mentoring them with the skills and knowledge to fulfill their roles. Without a doubt, the continued effectiveness of the program depends on

well-qualified, well-trained, skilled, and committed staff, especially considering that many will likely be asked to carry out their roles as collateral duties. You should also keep in mind a few other points:

- Staffing and recruitment strategy will vary by facility.
- Training and development include sharing and developing knowledge, skills, and abilities, preferably across IE functions.
- Performance plan and work plan development prepare staff for success in their positions.

Ideally, succession planning should be addressed as far in advance as possible. One big reason is the natural lag time required to educate and train new staff, which, depending on the IE staff member's previous involvement, may take six or more months. This is likely to have an impact on program continuity and may also affect ongoing ethics consultations, PE projects, and work on IE program metrics. Unfilled vacancies invariably place a greater burden of work on other team members. If they have not been cross-trained, their additional collateral responsibilities may create stress and frustration. It is also important to keep in mind that only rarely will someone newly hired from outside VA have the requisite ethics experience to enable them to jump in and take over a vacated IE position. Finally, ensuring expertise of new and existing IE staff requires ongoing assessment (using IE tools where available), education (to engage staff and reward participation), and training (to promote a high-level skills and proficiency).

## **What You Need to Do**

Collaborate with the IE council to regularly monitor components of staffing, recruiting, orientation, training, expertise, and whether planned individual development is taking place. Include the following activities on the IE council agenda on a recurring basis:

1. Manage staffing. Monitor current IE staff members in both key and team positions; anticipate vacancies and consider the time needed to backfill key roles. When turnover is going to occur, you may want to look at your existing team members first. They are more likely to have the requisite knowledge, skills, and experience, and this may advance a hardworking and dedicated team member. Strong succession planning prepares employees ahead of time with the skills and knowledge for new roles and responsibilities (see #7, Expertise, below). Identify and understand the developmental needs of employees to fill IE positions and cross-train staff for skills and positions that are not yet vacant. Continually review and check the process of succession, and whether planned individual development is taking place.



2. Broadly engage staff across the facility in IE activities. Recruit new members from staff who are invited to participate in ethics consultations and/or PE projects. Or invite new staff to participate in ad hoc IE activities such as [National Compliance and Ethics Week](#), or to lead lunch-and-learn sessions and decision panels. The more engagement and excitement you can build, the larger the pool of potential recruits for the core IE roles.

## Tip

One facility invites someone from the EC service to participate in morbidity and mortality rounds whenever the case to be reviewed included an ethics consult. Also, some facilities hold an annual facility-wide ethics book club. Multiple copies of the book are purchased by the medical library for staff to check out. Staff members with subject matter expertise or experience relevant to the topic of the book are recruited to participate in a panel to discuss the book at a facility forum.

3. Market upcoming IE position vacancies. When no obvious IE staff successor exists, you can market upcoming IE position vacancies by circulating a recruitment announcement for the opportunity. Recruit new members as needed and ensure that they receive basic introductory orientation and training. Recommended IE staff training can be found in [Section V. IE Basic Training Resources](#).

## Tip

The facility director/ELC at one facility sends a facility-wide email inviting staff to apply and compete for upcoming vacancies for the IEPO and IE function coordinator positions. This practice attracts interested and dedicated newcomers to manage these roles.

## 4. Update Performance Plans

- Ensure that performance plans for employees who participate in the IE program (i.e., IEPO, ECC, and PEC) include clear delineation of their ethics-related responsibilities. Supporting new and existing staff in their roles can improve retention and ensure the attainment of IE mission. Review performance plan language annually and revise as needed. Documents outlining standard responsibilities and requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) for IEPOs, ECCs, PECs, and ELCs are currently under development.
- IntegratedEthics and its function roles are mandated in the national [IE Directive](#). To support this requirement, link position descriptions and performance plans to support dedicated time. Staff work plans should include specific time allotments so that there is adequate time to address the complex nature of local ethics issues and concerns. All facilities are different,

but we recommend, for a medium complexity (Class II) medical center, at least 0.25 FTEE for EC or PE Coordinator, and 0.50 FTEE for an IEPO. You may wish to negotiate protected time for IE responsibilities to ensure that new recruits can successfully carry out their roles. A very active EC service with many consults each year would likely need more time for the ECC and even the ethics consultants. The time should match what the needs of the program are. These are things that should be discussed with the IE council and agreed to by leadership. It is a responsibility of leadership to ensure that appropriate resources, including IE staff time, are provided to do the work of IE. Work with your ELC to ensure adequate support. New recruits should have an addendum added to existing position descriptions or functional statements supporting protected time.

- A word about dual roles: especially in smaller facilities, one individual is often responsible for two positions. For example, the IEPO may also oversee the EC Service or PE Team. While this arrangement is not ideal, it is sometimes unavoidable. It is especially important that this person has both a good understanding of the program and enough time to perform both roles successfully.
5. Provide continuity. The incumbent in each position should plan to train the next person who will take up their responsibilities. Because of the steep learning curve and the time investment required to feel comfortable in these roles, you will want to find someone who is going to be able to not only perform the duties required by the role, but who is also committed to staying in the position. When you or your function leads are selecting new IE staff, find someone who is willing to be there for the long haul.

## Tip

The IEPO role at one facility is shared by two individuals; one is a clinician and the other, a department head. This tag-team approach has worked well in that it allows shared responsibility, division of tasks, guaranteed IE council leadership, and program momentum. Some facilities use service agreements signed by the IE staff members' supervisors and/or welcome letters signed by the facility director to demonstrate leadership's commitment to supporting the work of IE staff.

6. Arrange mentoring or sponsorship of new IE staff. Depending on the IE function, establish mentoring within your facility or even across the VISN (IE function lead positions). Contact your VISN IE POC for mentor recommendations.



## Tip

Several VISNs have established onboarding practices to facilitate transitioning facility IE function leads, wherein the VISN IE POC monitors changes in facility IE function lead assignments and matches an experienced IE mentor from one facility to provide guidance and assistance to a new IE staff mentee at another site.

7. Provide new IE staff with orientation and training. Make sure that new ECCs, and PECs receive their respective training tools and hand-off guides. These documents are designed to assist with the transition into these critical roles.

- Ethics Consultation Coordinator Training Tool and Hand-Off Guide
- Preventive Ethics Coordinator Training Tool and Hand-Off Guide

Also, ensure that EC Service and PE Team members who will be entering IE activities in [IEWeb](#) complete the [IEWeb Training Module \(TMS\)](#). IEWeb has three content areas for IE staff to record, track, and summarize the following IE activities:

- Ethics Consultation: record case and non-case consults
- Preventive Ethics: record intake forms and project reports; aligns with Lean methodology
- Ethics Activity Log: record education, training, rounding, referrals, and other ethics activities

8. Develop expertise. Ensure that IE staff participates in regular assessment, training, and education activities to build and maintain expertise and interest in their roles. All need to be familiar with the IE model and understand the responsibilities of their roles. Additionally, as adult learners and ethics role models, they need to assess their ethics knowledge regularly and continually strive to increase proficiency in their respective roles. You should collaborate with the IE council to monitor and support regular assessment, training, and education of IE staff, (see [Section V. IE Basic Training Resources](#)). Also, IEPO's should also encourage council members to review the [IE Council Member Orientation Guide](#). You should also encourage council members and other IE staff to attend weekly [Improvement Forum Calls](#). Facility IE staff should [Register for IE Mailgroups](#) to receive announcements about these happenings.

## Tip

Some facilities set aside blocks of time, such as half or whole day retreats, on an annual basis for training IE staff. And several facilities recruit multiple new ethics consultants at one time, then provide orientation and training in weekly or monthly 1-2 hour sessions.

### When and How Often You Need to Do It

Staffing and Expertise Activities	Frequency
Continually review and check the process of staffing, recruiting, orientation, training, expertise, and whether planned individual development is taking place <b>AS NEEDED</b> .	<b>AS NEEDED</b>
Broadly engage staff across the facility in IE activities to increase the pool of potential recruits for the core IE roles <b>AS NEEDED</b> .	<b>AS NEEDED</b>
Market upcoming IE position vacancies when no obvious IE staff successor exists; circulate a recruitment announcement <b>AS NEEDED</b> .	<b>AS NEEDED</b>
Performance Plan: Ensure that performance plans for employees who participate in the IE program (i.e., IEPO, ECC, and PEC) include clear delineation of their ethics-related responsibilities. Review performance plan language and revise <b>ANNUALLY</b> .	<b>ANNUALLY</b>
Provide continuity. The incumbent in IE positions should plan to train the next person who will take up their responsibilities <b>AS NEEDED</b> .	<b>AS NEEDED</b>
Arrange mentoring or sponsorship of new IE staff <b>AS NEEDED</b> .	<b>AS NEEDED</b>
Orient and train new IEPOs (your replacement), ECCs, and PECs by distributing training tools and hand-off guides. Also, ensure that EC Service and PE Team members who will be entering IE activities in <a href="#">IEWeb</a> complete the <a href="#">IEWeb Training Module (TMS)</a> . <b>AS NEEDED</b> .	<b>AS NEEDED</b>
Review IE staff assessment, training, and education needs and activities (see <a href="#">Section V. IE Basic Training Resources</a> ) <b>ANNUALLY</b> .	<b>ANNUALLY</b>

## B. Integration

### What You Need to Know

IntegratedEthics aims to assimilate ethics into the organizational mainstream and to coordinate ethics-related activities throughout the facility. As the IEPO, you should work with your IE council to promote two levels of integration within your facility. First, make sure that the three core IE functions are communicating with each other through established channels. This will ensure that all three benefit from each other's expertise and activities. Second, the program as a whole must be well-integrated with other parts of your organization and VISN. An IE council with a diverse membership is especially suited to support and coordinate the sharing of information about ethics-related activities, including ethics education throughout the facility.

## What You Need to Do

Communication is the fundamental activity necessary for developing and maintaining integration of both levels of IE outlined below. Through the council and other channels, you will want to establish effective communication mechanisms and relationships between IE functions, as well as between the IE program and other programs, offices, and leaders throughout the facility.

**First-level integration - among IE functions:** You and your IE council are responsible for ensuring the three core functions of your IE program are well-integrated with each other. The following steps will help promote effective IE council operations and, thus, IE program function communication and integration.

1. Ensure that IE council membership is diverse and high-profile. IE council members should represent all areas throughout the organization from which ethics issues arise, including clinical care services, research, and business administration. Rules-oriented compliance approaches (e.g., CBI) and values-oriented and integrity-based approaches (e.g., chaplaincy) both play vital roles in the ethical life of organizations. Council members are responsible for helping identify ethics issues across the facility that might benefit from the work of the council, such as non-case consults for the ECS or ethics quality gaps that might be appropriate for the PE team.
2. Establish regular channels of communication among IE council members, IE function leads, and all IE program staff through IE mail groups.
3. Ensure that your IE council meets regularly. Monthly meetings are recommended in order to maintain continuity, momentum, and interest.

### Tip

Some smaller facilities alternate core IE function team lead meetings with full IE council meetings each month. This is better than just bimonthly IE council meetings, as momentum and activities can be maintained during months between council meetings.

4. When absences occur, ensure that IE function leads and other IE council members arrange for appropriate coverage to ensure momentum and continuity of program functioning.
5. Ensure that IE council members are involved. Ask members to serve on policy, education, or program improvement subcommittees, or task them with special projects or activities.

## Tip

One facility's IE council tasks each member with bringing one ethics issue for consideration to the next meeting. You can use results from your All Employee Survey to pinpoint areas on which to focus.

6. Ensure that your IE council has a mission and vision, and that individual members are aware of their responsibilities and obligations to the program. An **IE council charter** is a useful tool for capturing IE council membership characteristics, responsibilities, communication, participation, meeting times, mission, vision, council self-assessment, and other important aspects of council operations. Minimally, a charter should set out the following 5 elements for an established committee: (1) Purpose; (2) Membership; (3) Function (including reporting structure); (4) Meeting frequency; and (5) Minutes and attendance. IE council member responsibilities are listed in the [IE Directive](#) and the [IE Council Member Orientation Guide](#). Many of the activities and procedures named in this document can be captured in the charter and reviewed on an annual basis.
7. Ensure that IE council meetings are managed and run effectively. Circulate the agenda and minutes in a timely manner. Secure administrative support to assist with IE council operations tasks, such as room scheduling, meeting invitations, agenda building and circulation, and minutes-keeping, as well as other IE program activities (non-recurring events, such as ethics training or promotional events). To make the best use of meeting time, consider use of a consent agenda that contains standing reports or other items that can be reviewed or approved prior to scheduled meetings. Note: If running a large meeting is a new skill for you, be sure to search TMS for courses on effective meeting management.
8. Focus your council on essential activities. Complete the [IE Council Self-Assessment Tool](#) annually to determine how well your IE council is performing responsibilities that promote both levels of integration and to identify areas that may need improvement.

**Second-level integration - IE throughout the facility and VISN:** Integrated Ethics functions must also be well-integrated with other parts of your facility and VISN. The IE council can be helpful in supporting coordination and information-sharing and ensuring that the IE program addresses the range of ethical concerns that arise in the organization in an integrated fashion and across the domains of health care ethics. These domains include: everyday workplace, business and management, government service, patient privacy and confidentiality, resource allocation, shared decision making with patients, professionalism in patient care, end-of-life care, and research.

To support these activities:

- Encourage IE council members to serve as IE program ambassadors who champion and support ethics-related activities throughout the facility. This will ensure that information regarding ethics activities, the IE program, ethics resources, and education on how to recognize ethical concerns or issues is communicated to all facility staff, Veterans, and their families. Your ELC, who chairs the IE council, is also responsible for ensuring communication between the council and other leadership boards or committees and can easily appoint IE council members to serve as representatives on those boards or committees. Council members should also be encouraged to represent ethics as they participate in numerous other boards or meetings on a routine basis. One task for the IE council would be to always consider the message that council members bring to these meetings. See [Section F. Access \(Publicity and Awareness\)](#) and [Section H. Organizational Learning](#) for additional ideas on integrating your program throughout your facility.
1. Use IT tools to establish mail groups, SharePoint sites and/or web pages to communicate and share ethics-related activities and materials with IE and facility staff, and, as appropriate, with Veterans and their families. Several facilities have created an IE webpage to communicate ethics-related activities, IE program information, ethics resources, including education, and successes throughout the organization. (See also [Section F. Access \(Publicity and Awareness\)](#)).
  2. Serve as the primary facility IE liaison to the VISN IE POC and to NCEHC. The IEPO should also serve as a member of the VISN IE advisory board at the request of VISN senior leadership. In this role, you will communicate and network with IE colleagues to share IE best practices, participate in VISN-wide IE initiatives, such as education, training, and VISN-initiated IE performance improvement planning and actions, and report back to the IE council.

### When and How Often You Need to Do It

Integration Activities	Frequency
Ensure that IE council membership is diverse and high- profile. <b>ONGOING.</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>
Establish regular channels of communication among IE council members, IE function leads, and all IE program staff. <b>ONGOING.</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>
IE council meets regularly <b>MONTHLY</b> or <b>BIMONTHLY</b> .	<b>MONTHLY</b> or <b>BIMONTHLY</b>
When absences occur, ensure that IE function leads and other IE council members arrange for appropriate coverage <b>AS NEEDED.</b>	<b>AS NEEDED</b>

Ensure that IE council members are involved. Ask members to serve on policy, education, or program improvement subcommittees, or task them with special projects or activities <b>AS NEEDED</b> .	<b>AS NEEDED</b>
Ensure that your IE council has a mission and vision, and that individual members are aware of their responsibilities and obligations to the program. Review IE council charter <b>ANNUALLY</b> .	<b>ANNUALLY</b>
Ensure that IE council meetings are managed and run effectively. <b>ONGOING</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>
Focus your council on essential activities. Complete the IE Council Self-Assessment Tool <b>ANNUALLY</b> .	<b>ANNUALLY</b>
Encourage IE council members to serve as IE program ambassadors. <b>ONGOING</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>
Use IT tools to communicate and share ethics-related activities and materials with IE and facility staff, and, as appropriate, with Veterans and their families. <b>ONGOING</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>
Serve as the primary facility IE liaison to the VISN IE POC and to NCEHC by attending VISN IE advisory board meetings and participating in VISN-wide IE initiatives <b>AS NEEDED</b> .	<b>AS NEEDED</b>

## C. Leadership Engagement and Support

### What You Need to Know

Because they establish organizational priorities and allocate the organization's resources, leaders are responsible for the success of all programs. IntegratedEthics is no exception. For the goals of IE to be realized, leadership must support and be engaged in the program. For IE, true leadership engagement and support accomplishes two purposes. First, it ensures the program's effectiveness. Second, it helps to create a healthy ethics environment and culture through promotion of EL practices.

The EL function is different from other core IE functions in that it does not have a step-by-step approach such as CASES in EC, or the intake form in PE. It does, however, have an EL coordinator (ELC), and provides the four compass points approach for fostering an ethical environment and culture. The ELC (who may or may not be the facility director - see [IE Directive](#), paragraphs 13 and 14) is responsible for managing the facility's EL function and chairing the IE council. Additionally, the ELC serves as a role model for ethical leadership by applying the compass points and advocating for actions that promote a strong ethical environment and culture. Typically, the ELC is quite busy and unable to personally coordinate all of the EL activities that should occur throughout the organization. As the executive officer of the IE council, the IEPO is responsible, along with the council, for engaging with and supporting the ELC in building and maintaining a strong and effective IE program and creating a positive ethical environment and culture. Here is how IEPOs and the IE council can support these activities:

## What You Need to Do

1. You and your IE council members should take steps to ensure the EL function is well-organized and effective. This makes it easy for leaders to perform and demonstrate support for EL activities. Ideally, you and the IE council should work with and support the ELC in meeting the responsibilities described in the [IE Directive](#). A recommended approach is to establish an EL work group that meets regularly outside of the IE council, both alone and with the ELC, to support planning, oversight, and implementation of core EL activities. Specific ELC responsibilities and suggested activities may include:
  - a. Serving as a role model for EL and advocating for actions that promote a strong ethical environment and culture in the facility. You can assist by coordinating development of a plan for ELC-backed promotion and distribution of the many tools that promote ethical leadership, listed in the Ethical Leadership webpage: <https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/ELC.asp>.

### Tip

To promote a strong ethical environment and culture, one facility opened up “gallery seating” to facility staff in its resource management committee to promote transparency of fiscal decision-making and resource allocation. Each month, staff can apply for one of five seats. Backed by the facility ELC, this action demonstrates that ethics is important by promoting openness and inclusiveness.

- b. Developing EL orientation for new facility leaders. You can assist by using IE and EL education and reference materials for new supervisor training. Draft a welcome message on behalf of the ELC that can be read during orientation, which highlights the importance of leadership involvement in creating a positive ethics environment and culture.
  - c. Facilitating strategic relationships across the organization that strengthen the ethical environment and culture and integrate IE into the foundation of the organization. You may collaborate with the ELC to ensure that your IE council is represented and makes regular reports to other groups or offices within your facility. This may necessitate coordinating with other facility groups that are responsible for promoting the organizational health of the facility, such as the [Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workforce Initiative](#) or [Compliance and Business Integrity](#) (CBI).
  - d. Developing, coordinating, supporting, and advocating for EL activities such as Ethical Leadership Curriculum ([Faculty Guide](#); [Slides](#); [Handouts](#)).



- e. Developing local annual performance and quality improvement plans for EL using NCEHC evaluation tools (e.g., the [Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment Tool](#); the [Facility Workbook](#); and national [IE Program Reporting](#) objectives).
  - f. Additional responsibilities include leading the completion of the EL section of the IE Facility Workbook, collaborating with the IEPO, ECC, and PEC to develop the facility IE policy, and making recommendations for assignment of staff to the IE council according to procedures established by the facility director.
2. Be familiar with and use the wide array of EL tools available on the IE website. For example, the [IE Program Status Check and Planning Tool](#) is a rapid assessment tool intended for use by IEPOs or ELCs to do a periodic, high-level scan for understanding how the IE program is working locally. Its use is optional, but can support:
- comprehensive quality improvement of key IE structures and processes using data from IE facility workbook;
  - briefings of senior IE and facility leadership; and
  - orientation of new leaders to the current “state of IE” in the facility.

To view all EL tools, visit the [EL web page](#).

### When and How Often You Need to Do It

Leadership Engagement and Support Activities	Frequency
Ensure the EL function is well- organized and effective by establishing an EL work group that reports to the IE council and meets to strategize and plan actions to support the ELC and execute EL responsibilities. <b>ONGOING.</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>
IEPO or IE council member reports on IE activities to leadership or administrative board(s) <b>QUARTERLY.</b>	<b>QUARTERLY</b>
IEPO completes IE Program Status Check and Planning Tool and shares results with facility director <b>ANNUALLY.</b>	<b>ANNUALLY</b>
Develop local annual performance and quality improvement plans for EL <b>ANNUALLY.</b>	<b>ANNUALLY</b>



## D. Policy

### What You Need to Know

The National Center for Ethics in Health Care is responsible for the development and oversight of national VHA policies related to ethics in health care, including:

- VHA Directive 1004.01, *Informed Consent for Clinical Treatments and Procedures*
- VHA Directive 1004.02, *Advance Care Planning and Management of Advance Directives*
- VHA Directive 1004.03, *Life-Sustaining Treatment (LST) Decisions: Eliciting, Documenting, and Honoring Patients' Values, Goals, and Preferences*
- VHA Directive 1004.04, *State-Authorized Portable Orders*
- VHA Directive 1004.05, *iMedConsent*
- VHA Directive 1004.06, *IntegratedEthics*
- VHA Directive 1004.07, *Financial Relationships Between VHA Health Care Professionals and Industry*
- VHA Directive 1004.08, *Disclosure of Adverse Events to Patients*
- VHA Directive 1005: *Informed Consent for Long-term Opioid Therapy for Pain*

These national policies are revised and reissued on a five-year schedule and establish requirements that must be reflected in local implementation documentation. Each policy undergoes a rigorous stakeholder feedback and concurrence process to ensure that its requirements promote and support ethical practice consistent with the VHA mission and vision. Information about the release of NCEHC policy and related communications and training are sent out via the IE Mailgroups. Your IE program staff may be called upon to review, comment on, or help implement these or other VHA policies that have ethical implications, e.g., those that address privacy, human subjects protection, management of disruptive behavior, transgender and intersex Veterans, etc. Your involvement in health care policies at your facility may vary depending on local practices and structures. NCEHC-developed policies are located on the [NCEHC Policy web page](#).

## What You Need to Do

You and your IE council should play a significant role in ensuring that your facility correctly implements and monitors national policy requirements through local documentation (e.g., charters and SOPs), and practice. Make sure that you educate yourself about local policy revision practices and establish or maintain contact with your local policy function (your ELC will be a great resource here). Finally, you should serve as the point of contact with those individuals who are the source of ethics knowledge and expertise for any facility policy that contains ethical content or implications.

Here are suggested steps:

1. Determine who is responsible for ensuring that local ethics procedures and practices are aligned with national requirements. Suggested steps to ensure IE involvement include:
  - a. Establish or maintain an existing IE council policy work group.
  - b. Ensure ethics representation on an existing facility policy committee (garner ELC support if necessary) and establish a process to coordinate, manage, or monitor national or local ethics-related policies. Develop regular communication pathways between the council and your facility's policy function to address policy concerns in a timely manner and ensure regular policy-related updates received through the IE mailgroup are made. Leverage the ethics expertise and knowledge in your council.
2. Visit the [NCEHC Policy web page](#) for copies of current NCEHC-developed policies and other resources designed to support facility implementation (e.g., fact sheets, PowerPoint presentations, related forms, model templates, sample scripts, and other resources).
3. Visit the [VHA Forms, Publications, and Record Management](#) webpage for access to all VHA policies and forms that may be relevant to your work.
4. An IE policy work group will need to establish its own schedule and time-line for review of local implementation documentation based on NCEHC- developed national policies. Establish or suggest a time line to accomplish requirements for *each* policy revision. It might help to develop a spreadsheet to track the following information: policy name, rescission date, responsible local person, responsible national office, notes or comments. This should be a regular IE council agenda item that is addressed at least quarterly.
5. Support the IE policy function by training and educating facility staff about new policy requirements.
6. You and your IE council should clarify roles and responsibilities of IE staff or

function (e.g., EC service) that are directly involved in applying and/or implementing ethics policies. Clearly communicate these roles and responsibilities to the appropriate policy review function for **each** policy.

7. Monitor ongoing compliance with ethics-related policies to ensure that policy standards are being met and be aware of organizational risk if the facility is not meeting those standards.
8. The IEPO/IE council must ensure that the IE program is structured and managed according to the provisions of the IE Directive by completing the IE Facility Workbook. (See [Section I. Evaluation and Improvement](#), below, for more on this tool.)
9. Participate in NCEHC-sponsored national information and education calls regarding new or revised policies. These policies are often featured on IF calls and include NCEHC subject matter experts discussing changes or revisions and ethical rationale, outlined requirements, and suggestions on how to align facility procedures, as well as Q&A content. Visit: [IF Call Documents and Summaries](#) web page.
10. Send ethics policy related questions to [VHAethics@va.gov](mailto:VHAethics@va.gov).

## When and How Often You Need to Do It

Policy Activities	Frequency
Ensure that local ethics procedures and practices are aligned with national policy requirements by establishing or maintaining an existing IE council policy workgroup and ensuring ethics representation on an existing facility policy committee. Establish a process to coordinate, manage or monitor national or local ethics-related policies. Develop regular communication pathways between the council and your facility's policy function to address policy concerns in a timely manner. <b>ONGOING.</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>
Visit the <a href="#">NCEHC Policy web page</a> for copies of current NCEHC-developed policies and other resources and the <a href="#">VHA Forms, Publications, and Record Management web page</a> <b>AS NEEDED.</b>	<b>AS NEEDED</b>
An IE policy work group will need to establish its own schedule and time-line for review and revision of local implementation documentation based on NCEHC-developed national policies. <b>ONGOING.</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>
Support the IE policy function by training and educating facility staff about new policy requirements <b>AS NEEDED.</b>	<b>AS NEEDED</b>
You and your IE council should clarify roles and responsibilities of IE staff or function (e.g., EC service) <b>AS NEEDED.</b>	<b>AS NEEDED</b>
Monitor ongoing compliance with ethics-related policies to ensure that policy standards are being met and be aware of organizational risk if the facility is not meeting those standards. <b>ONGOING.</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>
IEPO/IE council must ensure that the IE program is structured and managed according to the provisions of the <a href="#">IE Directive</a> by completing the IE Facility Workbook <b>ANNUALLY.</b> (See <a href="#">Section I. Evaluation and Improvement</a> , below, for more on this tool.)	<b>ANNUALLY</b>
Participate in NCEHC-sponsored national information and education calls. <b>ONGOING.</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>
Send ethics policy related questions to <a href="mailto:VHAethics@va.gov">VHAethics@va.gov</a> <b>AS NEEDED.</b>	<b>AS NEEDED</b>

## E. Resources

### What You Need to Know

As IEPO, you'll need to work closely with the function coordinators to understand, identify, and communicate program needs to the IE council and facility director. These needs may include clerical or data-entry support, library and other educational materials, ongoing training, and workspace.

Adequate resources will help the IE program operate at its best while reducing strain and work burden on IE staff. The IEPOs and IE function coordinators benefit especially from leadership support to complete the full range of duties that their roles require, from simple administrative tasks to more technical and analytical work.

### What You Need to Do

- Solicit EC, PE, and EL for resource requirements to develop and maintain IE functions and develop an improvement plan that will coincide with the local process. Learn about your facility's local resources review cycle to find out the best time of year to advocate for your IE program needs. Encourage use of the IE Facility Workbook and other assessment tools (e.g., Ethics Consultation Service Proficiency Assessment Tool) to identify specific IE staff education and training needs. Have IE function coordinators present their findings to the IE council on a regular basis, including recommendations or plans for improvement. Add "IE Program Resources" to the IE council agenda on an annual basis to discuss resources and monitor improvement plans at least quarterly.
- Identify and report overall IE program needs to the IE council and facility director on a regular basis. Such needs may include marketing materials to support National Compliance and Ethics Week, or the IE Program.

### When and How Often You Need to Do It

Resources Activities	Frequency
Solicit ECC, PEC, and ELC for resource requirements to develop and maintain IE functions. Develop an improvement plan that will coincide with the local process and evaluate resource improvement efforts <b>ANNUALLY</b> .	<b>ANNUALLY</b>
Monitor resource improvement efforts <b>QUARTERLY</b> .	<b>QUARTERLY</b>
Identify and report overall IE program needs to the IE council and facility director on a regular basis <b>QUARTERLY</b> .	<b>QUARTERLY</b>

## F. Access (Publicity and Awareness)

### What You Need to Know

To be effective, your program must be accessible to the patients, families, and staff it serves. Ongoing efforts must be applied to maintain publicity and awareness of the IE program and its functions. Thus, facility staff must know when and how to refer ethics concerns and issues to the ethics consultation service and preventive ethics teams, respectively. By working with the ECC and PEC, you help to create awareness of and support for IE and its functions throughout the facility. As a visible leader of IE, you can coordinate efforts to reach out to staff and leaders at all levels in the organization and share what IE has to offer. You help ensure that the program is visible to patients, families, staff, and leaders throughout the organization. IEPOs should collaborate with the IE council to develop, monitor, and evaluate the local publicity and awareness plan.

You should support the EC service by ensuring that patients and staff are aware of its existence, what it does, and how to access it. The service should be publicized through brochures, posters, newsletters, and other media through which patients and staff regularly receive information about the facility. IEPOs should add EC access (publicity and awareness) to the IE council agenda to determine if existing strategies are adequate. They should also ensure that the EC service is available throughout normal work hours and after hours, depending on consultation volume and need.

The PE team learns about systemic ethics issues from its own members and from institutional sources, including the IE council, the EC service, senior leaders, service and program heads, and quality management staff. You should support the PE team by ensuring that these groups are aware of the team's existence, understand what the team does, and know how to refer issues to the team for consideration. You should encourage the PE team to develop a referral network by establishing routine communication with key individuals, services, and programs. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the IE council, marketing PE should begin with IE council members and the programs and offices they represent or can connect with across the organization. IEPOs should encourage PEC involvement in key meetings to market PE to leaders and managers throughout the organization, and especially encourage "passing the message along" all the way to front line staff when appropriate. Potential referral sources will want to know what the team can do for them. Successfully completed PE projects and accompanying storyboards are powerful sources of persuasion.

Ensuring access to the IE program and its functions throughout the facility through publicity and awareness provides IEPOs and IE councils with the opportunity to promote staff ethics education (knowledge development), awareness of IE program

accomplishments (pride in belonging to an organization which values a positive ethics environment and culture), and organizational stewardship (connection to VHA mission and values). Interactions with staff related to ethics awareness and publicity should include appropriate content related to ethics education, IE program accomplishments, and organizational stewardship. See [Section H, Organizational Learning](#), for additional ideas about how to support this.

## What You Need to Do

The IEPO should collaborate with the IE council to develop an overall publicity and awareness plan that includes the following elements:

1. For EC, add **EC access** to the IE council agenda on a regular basis. Support publicity efforts by assigning the ECC to regularly develop and update brochures, posters, newsletters, and other media for patients and staff. Also, ask your ECC to present IEWeb data related to consultation volume and access on a regular basis.
2. Adapt the EC materials developed by NCEHC found here: [Ethics Consultation Brochure](#), [Ethics Consultation Poster](#), and [Ethics Consultation Flyer](#). These materials can be downloaded and customized with up to four lines of information prior to local printing or reproduction. Ethics consultation coordinators should also use the tool developed to celebrate National Compliance and Ethics Week: [Increasing Awareness of Ethics Consultation Availability Among Patients and Families](#).
3. IEPOs should encourage ECCs to conduct outreach and marketing with appropriate programs and services to ensure that patients and staff are aware of the ECS, what it does, and how to access it. Ongoing efforts should be assessed and revised as needed.
4. For PE, add **PE marketing** to the IE council agenda on a regular basis. Support PE efforts to network, starting with IE council members and the programs and offices they represent or can connect with across the organization. Encourage PEC involvement in key meetings to market PE to leaders and managers throughout the organization. Ongoing efforts should be assessed and revised as needed. The PE team should share information about the impact of PE or adapt the printout (e.g., into a PowerPoint presentation) of a completed IEWeb PE project to showcase PE achievements.
5. Encourage ECCs and PECs to draft and present EC service and PE function reports to facility staff, senior leadership, or executive leadership groups. IEPOs should seek

membership on executive leadership boards and committees (ELC can support this), share IE program work and accomplishments, and be available to serve as the ethics resource point of contact and subject matter expert as needed. Work with your IE council to identify other appropriate meetings or committees in which your IE staff can share IE program work and accomplishments. Content should be tailored for each audience and should include information for patients, families, and staff (including leadership) about EC, PE and EL services, activities, and effectiveness and successes (including EC case studies, PE cycles, EL actions, and overall program attributes such as activity levels).

## Tip

One facility's EC service made rounds at the hospital to pass out cookies and talk about ethics. The idea grew out of a brainstorming session about how to publicize the service's offerings and ensure that all staff members were aware of the availability of a resource to address ethical concerns in health care.

6. Enlist and continually remind IE council members to talk about the IE program in their own and other units or departments facility-wide to ensure that the overall program is visible to staff and leaders throughout the organization. Part of thinking about publicity and awareness is helping people understand the purpose and impact of the IE program. See [Section H, Organizational Learning](#) for ideas about how to support this.
7. Participate in partner program national awareness week activities, such as Quality Improvement Week and [National Compliance and Ethics Week](#). For the latter event, CBI and IE team up each year to promote the importance of ethics and compliance in VHA, and their ultimate connection to supporting our mission in support of Veterans. IEPOs should lead coordination of facility Compliance and Ethics Week activities.



## When and How Often You Need to Do It

Access (Publicity and Awareness) Activities	Frequency
For EC, add <b>EC access</b> to the IE council agenda <b>QUARTERLY</b> .	<b>QUARTERLY</b>
Adapt the EC materials developed by NCEHC. <b>ONGOING</b> .	<b>ONGOING</b>
IEPOs should encourage ECCs to conduct outreach and marketing. <b>AS NEEDED</b> .	<b>AS NEEDED</b>
For PE, add <b>PE marketing</b> to the IE council agenda <b>QUARTERLY</b> .	<b>QUARTERLY</b>
Encourage ECCs and PECs to draft and present EC service and PE function reports to facility staff, senior leadership, or executive leadership groups. <b>ONGOING</b> .	<b>ONGOING</b>
Enlist and continually remind IE council members to talk about the IE program in their own and other units or departments. <b>ONGOING</b> .	<b>ONGOING</b>
Assess publicity and awareness efforts <b>QUARTERLY</b> .	<b>QUARTERLY</b>
Participate in partner program national awareness week activities. Collaborate with your public affairs officer or look for IE listserv announcements regarding National Compliance and Ethics Week activities. <b>ONGOING</b> .	<b>ONGOING</b>

## G. Accountability

### What You Need to Know

Facility directors and ELCs are ultimately accountable for the IE program in facilities. However, since the IEPO serves as the executive director of the IE council, you are responsible for the day-to-day operations of the facility IE program. Accordingly, you are responsible for coordinating program activities and helping to ensure program accountability on behalf of your facility director and/or ELC. Your IE council, which is chaired by the ELC, should work to ensure IE program accountability. Together, you support the VHA mission and vision by working to define and give life to the organization's guiding values, create an environment that supports ethically sound behavior, and instill a sense of shared accountability among employees.

There are several activities that ensure IE program accountability and that ultimately should be reported through the ELC to your facility's leadership board or council. To begin with, EC and PE, like any other important health care function, must have a clear system of accountability. Day-to-day responsibility for EC and PE should rest with the ECC and PEC, respectively. These two coordinators are in turn accountable to IEPOs and the IE council, and ultimately to the ELC and the facility director, who is accountable for the overall IE program.

As IEPO, you and the IE council must provide a mechanism for oversight of EC and PE functions. The council is responsible for establishing specific goals, structures, processes, and performance expectations for these functions. IE program achievement goals, which drive implementation of EC, PE, EL, and the overall IE program, are designed to help with this and have been geared towards getting IE systems and processes in place from the very beginning. Typically, IE program metrics work to ensure that facilities assess all aspects of their program, identify key areas for program improvement, implement changes in response, and demonstrate program impacts.

Another important aspect of accountability is involving multiple programs throughout the organization. Two overarching and essential IE program management tasks that IEPOs and IE councils are also accountable for include: 1) moving ethics into the organizational mainstream, and 2) coordinating ethics-related activities throughout the facility. (See [Section B, Integration](#), for more on these topics.)

### What You Need to Do

Note: See also [Section I, Evaluation and Improvement](#).

1. Ask the ECC and PEC to use IE evaluation tools and to present updates on activities and IE program metrics to the council regularly. Ask the ECC and PEC to draft and distribute a similar report to facility staff, senior leadership, or executive leadership groups. This will serve as a useful reminder of the existence, availability, and value of the EC service and the PE function. It will also demonstrate how time spent by IE staff results in meaningful, measurable outcomes that benefit the IE program and, ultimately, the facility (which is useful when negotiating for protected IE staff time). Specific EC and PE accountability is addressed in the next two steps.
2. Address **EC accountability** in IE council meetings on a recurring basis and:
  - a. Ensure that the ECC administers and reports results of the [Ethics Consultation Service Proficiency Assessment Tool](#) (ECSPAT) to the IE council annually. Use the council to help suggest improvement strategies and actions and seek leadership support from the ELC and facility director for education and training resources needed to manage identified gaps.
  - b. Ask the ECC to provide regular updates on ECS improvement plan to the IE council.
  - c. Ensure that the ECC discusses results from IEWeb reports for the ongoing work of the EC service. These reports can provide aggregated data that help identify and track EC service quality improvement indicators.

- d. Ensure that the EC service has assigned the role of Evaluator in IEWeb. This individual will be responsible for managing the process of obtaining and documenting EC feedback from EC participants and closing out evaluation records. Ensure that the ECC reports results of these evaluations regularly to the IE council and seeks leadership support from the ELC and facility director for needed education and training resources to manage identified performance gaps.
3. Address **PE accountability** in IE council meetings on a recurring basis and ask the PEC to present regular updates to the council or to develop written reports on a quarterly basis.
4. Provide administrative oversight and ensure timely completion of IE program achievement goals. One of the most important IEPO responsibilities is to be familiar with IE program achievement goals and quarterly reporting requirements, including the annual technical manual, as well as support tools and materials. These are located on the [IE Program Reporting](#) webpage. NCEHC annual performance and quality improvement activities are released at the beginning of each fiscal year. Typically, each October, upcoming annual program metrics are described on an IF call. During the last month of each quarter, VISN POCs are provided with quarterly program reporting requirements and instructed to send instructions and questionnaires for facility reporting to each facility IEPO. VISNs set their own reporting deadlines for return of completed questionnaires. NCEHC-initiated performance and quality improvement activities typically require use of the IE Facility Workbook ethics questions in the All Employee Survey.
5. Complete the [IE Council Self-Assessment Tool](#) to evaluate how well your IE council is performing its responsibilities and identify areas that may need improvement.

## When and How Often You Need to Do It

Accountability Activities	Frequency
Ask the ECC and PEC to use IE evaluation tools and to present updates on activities and IE program metrics to the council. Ask the ECC and PEC to draft and distribute a similar report to facility staff, senior leadership, or executive leadership groups. <b>QUARTERLY.</b>	<b>QUARTERLY</b>
Monitor and assure adherence to annual IE program and quality improvement goals and requirements. <b>QUARTERLY.</b>	<b>QUARTERLY</b>
Address EC accountability in your IE council. Ensure that ECCs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report results of the ECSPAT (<a href="#">doc</a> and <a href="#">pdf</a>) and develop and implement an EC service improvement plan <b>ANNUALLY.</b></li> <li>Provide updates on ECS improvement plan <b>AT LEAST QUARTERLY.</b> Ensure that the ECC discusses results from IEWeb reports for the ongoing work of the EC service <b>QUARTERLY.</b></li> <li>Report IEWeb-generated evaluation reports to the IE Council <b>QUARTERLY.</b></li> </ul>	<b>ANNUALLY. and QUARTERLY</b>
Address <b>PE accountability</b> in your IE council. Ensure that PECs present regular updates to the council or develop written reports <b>QUARTERLY.</b>	<b>QUARTERLY</b>
Complete the <a href="#">IE Council Self-Assessment Tool</a> to evaluate how well your IE council is performing its responsibilities and to identify areas that may need improvement <b>ANNUALLY.</b>	<b>ANNUALLY</b>

## H. Organizational Learning

### What You Need to Know

An essential task for the IEPO is to ensure that the EC, PE and EL functions contribute to organizational learning through dissemination and exchange of their experiences and findings.

For the EC service and PE team sharing their knowledge and experience with others in the organization might include group discussion of actual cases (appropriately modified to protect the identities of patients and participants) or PE projects to educate clinical staff. For example:

- A consultation service note can be reworked into a newsletter article that summarizes an important ethics topic. Policy questions handled by the service can be turned into Frequently Asked Questions and posted on a website.
- A PE project can be reworked into a newsletter article that summarizes an important ethics quality gap. When a PE project finds that practice is compromised because staff doesn't understand policy, the PE team can create Frequently Asked Questions and post them on a website.

Efforts such as these not only enhance staff knowledge, but also enhance the credibility and visibility of EC and PE. See [Section F. Access \(Publicity and Awareness\)](#).

### What You Need to Do

1. The IEPO should collaborate with the IE council to develop an EC, PE, and EL organizational learning plan. Work with your ECC, PEC, and EL workgroups to identify appropriate case and non-case consults, PE storyboards, and EL actions, respectively, that can be shared in a variety of formats (newsletters, ethics informational staff emailing) and venues (town hall meetings, staff meetings, or retreats). Bring these EC consults, PE cycles, and EL actions to the IE council for a strategy talk on how to best share the knowledge, experience, and outreach efforts throughout the facility. Volunteer your participation for special gatherings such as a staff and management retreat. Frequency will depend on how many completed consults, storyboards, and actions that EC, PE, and EL functions complete. It will also depend on the time and resources that EC and PE staff and IE council members can devote to this task. Place this important topic on the council's agenda on a regular basis to monitor actions and keep it highly visible. Regularly consider whether the EC service, PE team and EL work group effectively disseminate their knowledge and experience with others in the organization. Your IE council should also evaluate past organizational learning initiatives to consider effectiveness and consider new approaches for the coming year.
2. Encourage other IE team members such as IE council members to help share IE program successes in their own departments/units. These efforts can be combined with other outreach and marketing efforts (see [Section F. Access \(Publicity and Awareness\)](#)).

### When and How Often You Need to Do It

Organizational Learning Activities	Frequency
IEPOs should collaborate with the IE council to develop an EC, PE, and EL organizational learning plan. IEPOs and the council should regularly consider whether the EC service, PE team, and EL work group effectively disseminate their knowledge and experience with others in the organization. <b>ANNUALLY.</b>	<b>ANNUALLY</b>
Monitor actions <b>QUARTERLY.</b>	<b>QUARTERLY</b>
Evaluate EC, PE and EL organizational learning plans and effectiveness <b>ANNUALLY.</b>	<b>ANNUALLY</b>
Encourage other IE team members such as IE council members to help share IE program successes in their own departments/ units. <b>ONGOING.</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>

# I. Evaluation and Improvement

## What You Need to Know

Ensuring the success of the IE program requires evaluation of its functions as well as of the program itself. This requires ongoing systematic assessment of the operation and/or outcomes of the program compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards as a means of contributing to the continuous improvement of the program.

IEPOs should collaborate with the IE council to establish annual performance and quality improvement goals for the facility IE program. These should be based on relevant IE data sources, including the [IE Facility Workbook](#), and the national [IE Program Reporting](#) objectives for IE. This includes monitoring and reporting on achievement of facility and national IE program performance and quality improvement goals to facility leadership, the IE council, and the VISN IE POC on a quarterly basis, or as requested.

IEPOs and IE councils should also directly support ELC and EL work groups with development of local annual performance and quality improvement plans for EL. In most cases, goals and targets selected will be based on data from approved NCEHC evaluation tools (e.g., the [Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment Tool](#) and the [IE Facility Workbook](#).) However, if data from a different systematic evaluation of EL yield information more relevant to the facility's EL performance, they can form the basis of the performance and quality improvement plan.

## What You Need to Do

1. Become familiar with the purpose and scope of the IE Facility Workbook, which focuses on the IE program. In [Section G, Accountability](#), we discussed how IEPOs and IE councils provide administrative oversight and ensure timely completion of IE program achievement goals. These performance and quality improvement activities may require use of the IE Facility Workbook. The [IE Program Status Check and Planning Tool](#) is another useful tool when considering overall IE program improvement. Annually, you should map out annual performance and quality improvement activities including use of evaluation and assessment tools and subsequent actions. The Evaluation and Improvement Activities table below suggests an approach that coincides with annual NCEHC-initiated goals and requirements. Add EC and PE program function evaluation and improvement to the IE council agenda on a quarterly basis to review results of evaluation tools, reports and quality improvement plans.
2. Establish IE council work groups to assist with completion of various components of IE performance and quality improvement activities. For example, your IE council

may wish to establish an ad hoc work group to take responsibility for a particular annual IE performance goal. The EC and PE functions may wish to establish workgroups within their own functions, and activities can be reported to the IE council on a regular basis by the ECC and PEC.

## IE Evaluation Tools

Tool	Purpose
IE Program Status Check and Planning Tool	<p>This assessment tool is designed for use by IE councils to perform a high-level assessment on an annual or other timely basis for the purpose of understanding how the IE program has been working over the past fiscal year, identifying areas that may need improvement, and planning future actions and identify priorities. The four sets of questions match the four IE program areas found in the IE Facility Workbook. The use of this tool is optional but can support, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive quality improvement of key IE structures and processes using data from IE Facility Workbook</li> <li>• Briefings of senior IE and/or facility leadership</li> <li>• Orientation of new leaders to the current “state of IE” in the facility</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">IE Program Status Check and Planning Tool</a></p>
IE Facility Workbook	<p>The IEFW is designed to help facilities assess current ethics quality, identify strengths as well as opportunities for improvement, set goals, and develop quality improvement plans. Provides information about the mechanisms, processes, and systems that a facility has in place to address ethical concerns. Completed annually as part of IE program reporting requirements via a web-based workbook found on the <a href="#">IEFW web page</a>. Follow the link for current and prior year responses. First-time users should follow the “Register” link to gain access to blank and completed workbooks.</p>

## When and How Often You Need to Do It

Evaluation and Improvement Activities	Frequency
Complete the <a href="#">IE Program Status Check and Planning Tool</a> <b>ANNUALLY</b> .	<b>ANNUALLY</b>
<p>Complete <a href="#">IE Facility Workbook</a> annually. <b>QUARTERLY</b>. Goals include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q1: Implement improvement strategies identified in prior year IEFW.</li> <li>• Q2: Review prior year completed IEFW; circulate current year IEFW Sections to ECC and PEC for completion of Sections 2 and 3, Ethics Consultation and Preventive Ethics, respectively; IEPO completes Section 1, Overall Ethics Program, and collaborates with ELC or EL work group to complete Section 4, Ethical Leadership.</li> <li>• Q3: Complete current year IEFW by the end of quarter.</li> <li>• Q4: Develop improvement plans and actions for upcoming fiscal year.</li> </ul>	<b>QUARTERLY</b>

<p>Add EC and PE program function evaluation and improvement to the IE council agenda on a <b>QUARTERLY</b> basis to review results and improvement plans as they relate to the following ECC and PEC activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ethics Consultation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• annual completion of ECPAT by EC service consultants</li> <li>• annual completion of ECSPAT by ECC</li> <li>• IEWeb Evaluation Report</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Preventive Ethics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• development and implementation of quality improvement plans for the PE function</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<b>QUARTERLY</b>
<p>Establish IE council workgroups to assist with completion of various components of IE performance and quality improvement activities and EC and PE functions. <b>ONGOING.</b></p>	<b>ONGOING</b>

## Tip

Check out the [IE Facility Workbook Analysis Tool](#) developed by South Texas Veterans Health Care System IE program staff. This tool moves the IE workbook questions to a concise document that can be easily reviewed and discussed at meetings and with other groups. The South Texas IE team recognized early on the need for a mechanism to reach consensus amongst themselves regarding which workbook responses represented strengths, which were acceptable, and which should be addressed as opportunities for improvement for each core function and the program as a whole.



## IV. Model IE Council Agenda

We've received comments over the years from IEPOs to the effect that they don't know what to do during IE council meetings. The following model IE council agenda, combined with activities detailed in this desk reference, should provide a good mix of topics to address. This conceptual agenda combines some of the usual elements of meeting agendas including **Topic, Discussion**, etc., with suggested agenda items to help ensure that all elements of IE program operations are regularly addressed. In particular, you'll notice the inclusion of time-saving **Consent Agenda** items (such as EC, PE, and EL function reports that can be circulated for review prior to the actual meeting), **Standing Items** from the IE program operations activity tables found in **Section IV**, and **Recommendations to Leadership, Facility Councils/Boards, and the VISN IEAB** to ensure integration and communication of IE program activities throughout the organization. This model isn't intended as a one-size-fits-all agenda, so feel free to modify it to suit your particular needs.

### IntegratedEthics Council Meeting Agenda

Topic	Discussion	Outcome/ Recommendations/ Next Action	Responsibility/ Due Date/ Status
Previous Minutes			
Consent Agenda Items <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>EC, PE, and EL Reports</li></ul>			
Standing Items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Staffing and Expertise</li><li>Integration</li><li>Leadership Engagement and Support</li><li>Policy</li><li>Resources</li><li>Access (publicity and awareness)</li><li>Accountability</li><li>Organizational learning</li><li>Evaluation and Improvement</li></ul>			
Recommendations to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Leadership</li><li>Councils/Boards</li><li>VISN IE Advisory Board</li></ul>			
Next Meeting			

## V. IE Basic Training Resources

Designated IE Staff	Training Activity	Required
<b>1. VHA Leaders</b>	a. Read the EL primer, watch the accompanying video, and complete the video exercises titled: <i>Ethical Leadership: Fostering an Ethical Environment &amp; Culture</i> (TMS #63240) and complete the self-assessment tool.	No (Recommended)
<b>2. IE Program Officer (IEPO)</b>	a. Read <a href="https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/Program_Management.asp">IEPO Quick-start Guide</a> on the IE Program Management page: <a href="https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/Program_Management.asp">https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/Program_Management.asp</a> b. Read the primer, watch the accompanying video, and complete the video exercise titled: <i>Ethical Leadership: Fostering an Ethical Environment &amp; Culture</i> (TMS #63240) c. Read the primer, watch the accompanying videos (Parts I and II), and complete the video exercise titled: <i>Ethics Consultation: Responding to Ethics Questions in Health Care</i> (TMS #63203) d. Read the primer and complete the TMS course titled: <a href="#">Preventive Ethics Adventure 1: Advance Directives</a> (TMS #4180882) e. Read <i>IntegratedEthics Program Officers Desk Reference</i> f. Complete the IEWeb Training Module (TMS) and read the User Guide located on the IEWeb webpage: <a href="https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEWeb.asp">https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEWeb.asp</a>	No (Recommended)
<b>3. Ethics Consultation Coordinator (ECC)</b>	a. Read the <i>Ethics Consultation Coordinator Training Tool and Handoff Guide</i> b. Read the primer, watch the accompanying videos (Parts I and II), and complete the video exercise titled: <i>Ethics Consultation: Responding to Ethics Questions in Health Care</i> (TMS #63203) c. Complete the IEWeb Training Module (TMS) and read the User Guide located on the IEWeb webpage: <a href="https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEWeb.asp">https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEWeb.asp</a>	No (Recommended)
<b>4. Ethics Consultant</b>	a. Read the primer, watch the accompanying videos (Parts I and II), and complete the video exercise titled: <i>Ethics Consultation: Responding to Ethics Questions in Health Care</i> (TMS #63203) b. Complete the IEWeb Training Module (TMS) and read the User Guide located on the IEWeb webpage: <a href="https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEWeb.asp">https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEWeb.asp</a>	No (Recommended)
<b>5. Preventive Ethics Coordinator (PEC)</b>	a. Read the <a href="#">Preventive Ethics Coordinator Handoff Guide</a> b. Read the primer and complete the TMS course titled: <a href="#">Preventive Ethics Adventure 1: Advance Directives</a> (TMS #4180882) c. Complete the IEWeb Training Module (TMS) and read the User Guide located on the IEWeb webpage: <a href="https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEWeb.asp">https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEWeb.asp</a>	No (Recommended)

6. Preventive Ethics Team Members	a. Read the primer and complete the TMS course titled: <a href="#">Preventive Ethics Adventure 1: Advance Directives</a> (TMS #4180882) b. Complete the IEWeb Training Module (TMS) and read the User Guide located on the IEWeb webpage: <a href="https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEWeb.asp">https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEWeb.asp</a>	No (Recommended)
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Training materials listed in the table can be found at:

- a. NCEHC IE internet and intranet websites:  
<http://www.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/ieresources.asp> and <http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/index.asp>
- b. The TMS website, [TMS \(Training\)](#). Search for key word “IE.”

The following documents provide designated IE staff with tools for managing their respective core functions:

- a. Hand-off Guide for VISN POCs:  
[https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/VISN\\_POC\\_Hand-off\\_Guide\\_20101002.doc](https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/VISN_POC_Hand-off_Guide_20101002.doc)
- b. IEPO Quick-start Guide:  
[https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/IEPO\\_Quick\\_Start\\_Guide.pptx](https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/IEPO_Quick_Start_Guide.pptx)
- c. Ethics Consultation Coordinator Training Tool and Hand-off Guide:  
[https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/ECC\\_Handoff\\_Guide.doc](https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/ECC_Handoff_Guide.doc)
- d. Preventive Ethics Coordinator Handoff Guide:  
[http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/pec\\_hnd\\_off\\_guide\\_20120105.pdf](http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/pec_hnd_off_guide_20120105.pdf)

The following primers with accompanying videos provide essential information about the IE model and the work of each core function. These materials should be used as key IE resources:

- a. *Ethical Leadership: Fostering an Ethical Environment & Culture*
  - 1) Primer [http://www.ethics.va.gov/docs/IntegratedEthics/Ethical\\_Leadership\\_Fostering\\_an\\_Ethical\\_Environment\\_and\\_Culture\\_20070808.pdf](http://www.ethics.va.gov/docs/IntegratedEthics/Ethical_Leadership_Fostering_an_Ethical_Environment_and_Culture_20070808.pdf)
  - 2) Video

[http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/pec\\_hnd\\_off\\_guide\\_20120105.pdf](http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/pec_hnd_off_guide_20120105.pdf)

- 3) Video Exercises  
[https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/Ethical\\_Leadership\\_Video\\_Course.pdf](https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/Ethical_Leadership_Video_Course.pdf)
- 4) Ethical Leadership Self-assessment Tool  
[https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/Ethical\\_Leadership\\_Video\\_Course.pdf](https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/Ethical_Leadership_Video_Course.pdf)

b. *Ethics Consultation: Responding to Ethics Questions in Health Care*

- 1) Primer (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)  
[http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/ec\\_primer.pdf](http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/ec_primer.pdf)
- 2) Video, Part I <https://bcove.video/2gKq7tZ>
- 3) Video, Part II <https://bcove.video/2hKSXub>
- 4) Video Exercises  
[https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/Ethics\\_Consultation\\_Video\\_Course.pdf](https://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/Ethics_Consultation_Video_Course.pdf)
- 5) Ethics Consultant Proficiency Assessment Tool  
[http://www.ethics.va.gov/docs/integratedethics/ec\\_pat\\_12232013.docx](http://www.ethics.va.gov/docs/integratedethics/ec_pat_12232013.docx)

c. *Preventive Ethics: Addressing Ethics Quality Gaps on a Systems Level*

- 1) Primer (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)  
[http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/pe\\_primer\\_2\\_edition\\_042015.pdf](http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/pe_primer_2_edition_042015.pdf)
- 2) TMS Course  
[\*Preventive Ethics Adventure 1: Advance Directives\*](#) (TMS #4180882)