Iday: Welcome everyone to this webinar. We appreciate you taking time today to hear more about the research enterprise transformation effort, an important step in the process about learning more about the centers. I will very quickly cover the agenda for today and then hand this over to Molly and Grant who are on the line to take us through the details. Real quickly, our intention today is to, number one, provide an update on the research enterprise transformation effort. It is a great opportunity for us to share where we are in the journey. Following that, we also want to double click on the Organization Alignment Initiative, which is the specific focus for today’s discussion. And as a part of that, we will reach out for some help on collecting more information about the ORD centers with intention to understand more about them. Grant will talk a little bit more about that pretty soon. On the backend, we will walk through the process of how we intend to collect that information, and we have reserved about 15-20 minutes on the backend for Q&A to make sure there is full clarity as we wrap up this conversation. With that, I will invite Molly to take us through an update of the research enterprise transformation where things stand. Molly, over to you.

Molly: Just to give an update on what’s going on with the enterprise transformation, any of you may have heard Dr. Mohi [PH] speak on a number of occasions. Changing into this enterprise is to make sure that we have the right people, the right tools, the right processes so that we can fully perform the functions that we need for a whole of VA approach for Veteran health, for Veteran wellbeing, and for healthcare research through the work we do through our science. The way we came to look at what would be meaningful if we were an enterprise are these qualities that are listed here, and I’m not going to go through each one of them, and you guys can have this slide deck for your reference. But it is just really to make sure that we understand who we are and who we want to be and how we want to be able to support the researchers and our staff who support researchers. We have seven key initiatives at this point. We had a couple more that we’ve worked through, but there are seven that we are working on in 2023, and I lead the Organizational Alignment. I’m a key player in the IT and data governance, but we have a number of different initiatives looking at all aspects of what we’re doing. Now, we’ve prioritized these. There are more initiatives that will come down the pike, but these are some of the foundational initiatives that we need to get done in order to make the enterprise a success. We’re going to talk mainly about the Organizational Alignment Initiative, which again, is looking at the structure and the roles within the organization to be successful. Centers are key part of what we fund in ORD in the field. You guys are the lifeblood of how we put money out into the field to ensure that the research that needs to get done is getting done, and this is, of course, through the HSRD centers, through the CSP centers, through the BLRD centers and RRD centers. Now, we know that there are more centers out there, but they are not funded by ORD. You’ve got the GRECC’s and the MIRECC’s and all kinds of things, and of course, we’re going to have to coordinate with them. But we really want to focus currently on what we fund because that is what we can, with your help, control. There are 78 centers that we have identified through our initial efforts, and they are all over the country, and again, I just named off the different groups that control them. And they do different functions, right? There are people that are epidemiology centers. There are groups that are translational education and mentoring centers. There are TBI brain health centers. We’ve got the coins that focus on different aspects, so all of our centers have some unique capabilities and some things that they do that are the same. And I just want to make clear that query is not included in this look at what we’re doing right now because we’re looking at the research funded centers, the research dollar funded centers, and query is funded out of medical care dollars. The whole goal of what we’re trying to do by bringing all of you together is get a better understanding of what the centers do and how we can better help the centers to achieve their mission and see what is potentially also overlapping between those missions so that we can better coordinate among the centers. We started off looking at publicly available data off of your website, off of papers that have been published. We talked to some of the center managers directly to get some information, and now we’re at a point where we want to talk to you the center leadership about anything else that you want to add to what we have already collected. And this is ultimately to bring us to this share understanding. Really the goal of this is to help you do your mission, to help us do our mission, but to make sure that you have access to the data, the operational resources, and the staffing you need to do your job and with all of our jobs being focused on the wellbeing of our Veterans whether that be through Health Sciences Research, which drives the system to provide better care whether it is to a scientific discipline itself of changing how we deal with traumatic brain injury, PTSD, what have you, making sure that if anyone needs tailored support for your particular center that we identify and address those needs and then to make sure that we have the information so that we can be an advocate for your center or centers to make sure that when we have to do congressional budget justifications or whatever it is that we have the information we need to be good advocates for you. The information, again, I talked about the fact that we’ve already done the first two parts of this and that what we’re talking about today is really this current focus. Am I supposed to turn it over to you Iday at this point?

Iday: I can take it from here. Thank you. As you heard from Molly, we are at a point where we both want to validate what we have learned so far through publicly available sources and have direct information from all of you in terms of what happens at each and every center, the goal being, as Molly mentioned, pretty specific and unique activities that happen at these centers to contribute towards research. The intention here is to get as clear of a picture of that as possible. What we decided to do as a first step in that journey is to create a questionnaire that will go to every single center. The questionnaire will have a specific set of questions that we hope the center leadership can complete by sourcing information from your centers as necessary. This is set up on a Microsoft form, so you can complete this questionnaire online. Each center will receive an email to the center leadership by end of day tomorrow so that we can also include a recording this for tomorrow. Please watch out for that one email. It will have two links, one link to the Microsoft forms to complete the questionnaire, the other link to review this webinar again. Coming out tomorrow. If we then talk about what is included in that Microsoft form questionnaire, we interpret this again to be the first step in this journey. It will take less than 10 minutes for you to complete. It has a handful of short questions to understand what is the primary focus of your center, the specific research and/or research support activities performed at your center. We tried to capitalize between the two, and you’ll have the opportunity to select which ones that we’ve defined as either a performing center or add more to that to say we do something that is not covered in the questionnaire. We also want to share in that questionnaire what we’ve learned in our journey so far and give you an opportunity to confirm if you have that information and, if not, clarify your ad board information so we have the accurate picture about what is happening at your center. Just to recap, a quick, less than 10 minute questionnaire. Again, center leadership will receive one email, but please leverage all the information available within the center. We are hoping to complete this exercise within a week, so tomorrow is Wednesday. The email request going out Wednesday, and we are hoping we can get the responses from all the centers back by end of day next Wednesday, which is the 24th. That is the process. It should be a fairly straightforward process once the questionnaire comes out tomorrow. Within that, you will also receive some guidance for who you can reach out to if you have any followup questions about the questions. Just to wrap up, I think this is a great opportunity for you all to help us really understand what is happening within each of the centers. I think the unknowns are really invaluable, so anything and everything we hear from you will be supremely valuable to create this big share of discerning of the centers to ultimately ensure that we can achieve the goals that Molly mentioned earlier in terms of appropriate support for centers. That covers the content for today. I think we went through that fairly quickly, so we have more time for questions if you need to. Let’s pause here to see what questions if there are any, and we can open up for Q&A.

Unidentified Male: We’re not seeing any yet, so we’ll give folks a minute or two to put them in. And just a reminder to everyone that Q&A is going to be in the bottom righthand corner of your screen, and if you don’t see it just click those three dots for more panels. We’ll give folks a couple minutes here.

Molly: I did not mean to speed through it. I’m happy to – I do want to get to questions. We’ve heard there may be questions about what we’re doing and why we’re doing this. We recognize that some centers – that each center really is different, and there may be functions that you do that you see as central to us, and we’d like to hear about that. That is the big thing is I’ve learned a lot through this process. I’ve been with the VA it will be five years in October, and I have to say that, as we began this organizational alignment, I feel like I’ve learned more about the VA in this past year and all of the assets and resources that we have and that we fund than I knew about previously. I don’t know how much you all know about each other. So, certainly, we will share everything that we learn and all the resources that are out there. A question came up earlier today about, if we have a function that we do at our center, but we only scaled it for our center, we can’t offer that as sort of an enterprise resource. Well, what we’re looking at is is the service or function that you're offering something that really could be an enterprise resource and should we put more money and people and resources into it so that it could serve a larger function. Those are some things to also think about. Don’t hide your light under a bushel. Tell us what you do, and we’re happy to hear all about it. Grant and Chris, you’re welcome to chime in.

Grant: Thank Molly. Hey everyone. I think hopefully this has been clear about the goal. I think one thing just maybe to clarify and reiterate. There is no predetermined outcome here, right? Simply as Iday and Molly and others have described, we’re simply gathering information. I think having that information allows us to better understand, one, all the tremendous work that you folks are doing. It also allows us to be better able to speak about it and think about next steps. Even though this was a relatively short presentation, I think the goal here was we didn’t want to just simply drop a questionnaire on all of you and have you wonder what is this all about. That is why we decided to have a webinar realizing that this was relatively short notice and appreciate the fact that we have almost 100 people on this call. We do encourage you to share for those of your colleagues who couldn’t join besides the fact that this is being recorded to help communicate this to them, and again, if there are questions, we are happy to take them.

Molly: I just got notified offline that it seems the chat might be disabled for our participants.

Grant: The chat is disabled, but they should be able to put questions in the Q&A function itself. Just a reminder to everyone that is going to be a different box than the chat box. If you go down to that bottom righthand corner of your Webex screen, you should see a bunch of little options. If you don’t see a question mark, a square with a question mark in it, click those three dots for more panels all the way at the bottom right and Q&A will be one of the options. If folks are having a difficult time, we can reactivate the chat and get questions there.

Iday: Now, they are starting to roll in. Parker, we’ll let you run with that.

Parker: We can just go in order. The first question is which center leaders will receive the invite? We have directors and associate directors.

Grant: One thing to reiterate. Hopefully, we captured all the center directors, all of you folks who received the invite, but we want to make it clear that when we send it out really what we’re looking for is one questionnaire response per center. It does not have to be the center director, although it can be. The center director can delegate if they wish to someone else on their staff who might be better positioned to answer or have the time to answer it. Again, as Iday mentioned, these questions aren’t going to require a whole lot of heavy lifting for you to dig up information. It should be information you already have in your head already that you can readily provide. Again, we’re just looking for one person per center.

Iday: Just to build off that. We also worked with the center managers to identify the appropriate lead for each center, so that will be the first pass. If we run into any issues or bounce backs, we’ll continue to work with the center managers to identify the right leaders within each center. Second question. Is there a plan to share the results of the questions back with the field?

Molly: We’re going to be taking the information that we get from these and putting them together, analyzing them, it’s going to take us probably a couple months. Again, it is 78 different centers responding to this. We will take a look at it. We may have to retrack out to clarify some things with certain center directors, but ultimately to have a listing of all the resources that are available in the field whether they are specific for that center or we’re going to invest more in them and make them enterprise resources is something that ultimately we do want to do.

Iday: Next question is it would be nice if we could see all of the questions asked and/or see a list of the questions after this webinar.

Grant: I’ll go ahead and take that. Basically, again, the questionnaire will come out. The link to the questionnaire will come out after this seminar. If I remember correctly, it is seven questions. Very simply kind of what do you, who are you, and is your mission statement correct as indicated from information we’ve already gathered, and then also an opportunity for people to respond to some free text responses about what your center capabilities might be. Again, center directors will be getting the questionnaire soon after this webinar concludes. That is why, again, we’re having this webinar so that it doesn’t just drop on you and you're wondering what it is all about. I’m just looking at this. Did we get to Alan’s question about sharing the results? I think we did that.

Molly: Yes.

Iday: I’m marking the ones we answer as we go. The next one on the list is when is the goal to complete the transformation?

Molly: That is a complicated question. The internal ORD transformation we are projecting for October of 2024 for us to have the majority of the internal transformation completed. In terms of changes potentially to the field, we haven’t set that yet because frankly we don’t have the information yet to be able to analyze that and come up with a good plan. But I promise, as part of the ongoing transformation efforts, you all will be kept certainly in the loop about what is going on.

Iday: Next question from Pete is most of us submit annual reports to ORD describing our center’s themes, infrastructures, and accomplishments in great detail. It seems like this questionnaire is asking the same questions we just answered in that annual report.

Grant: Let me take a stab at that and then Molly if you want to follow up on that. Just to reiterate a point. We have gathered the information from your annual reports and kudos to the center managers here in ORD who helped us with gathering some of that information. Of course, a lot of that information is a lot more detailed, and we were able to kind of cull over all the information. On some level, it is similar, but it is not going to be the exact same information. As you’ll see again in the questionnaires that we will send out, it is more kind of tell us about what you think your centers scope might be. Is it enterprise level? Is it project specific? There is kind of a level of description there that assumes – in your annual reports, there is context that kind of assumes that whoever reads your annual reports whether it be rehab RD, HSRD, etc., they already know the context so there is not that level of detail for someone who really doesn’t know what your center does would not be able to gather. That is a lot of what this questionnaire is intended to do. It will be kind of related but not going to be the exact same information as in your center reports. I don’t know if Chris is on. He had a conflict, but he is hoping to join.

Chris: I’m joining briefly, but I have to drop off again, but then I’ll come back. My apologies.

Iday: Next question. It is a struggle to keep track of all the communication. Can the next call utilize teams because it is easier to track and go back to the call notes, etc.

Grant: I’m going to ask if maybe I’m misunderstanding the context of all the communication. It could be referencing all the organizational alignment. This is the first communication with regards to the center mapping initiative, and maybe there will be future webinars as we present things, but the reason we used this particular platform today is this is what we typically use for ORD field2 webinars. It is archived. It is on the ORD PNE [PH] website, which I think hopefully all of you are familiar with, so that is why we used this particular platform for today.

Iday: The last question on the list as far as I can see is it seems like a repeat of the earlier one. We might have addressed this, but just to be sure. RR&D centers and REAPS historically have submitted annual reports every fiscal year. Does ORD intend to use such reports to supplement information received through the questionnaire?

Molly: That is sort of at step two. So, step one, we went onto the website and looked for things. Step two, we used information out of past reports to gather some data. We will collect up all the newest reports that have been submitted as well. Yes, we plan to get as much information as we can, and we’re really not trying to make you re-answer the same questions that you’ve been answering. We did have a smaller group of center directors that we used as sort of our consulting group to help us get to the right questions.

Iday: If I may build on what Molly just said because this part might also be a little tricky as you all receive the request. What we’ve been able to learn so far we do intend to share that with you. That will be a part of the email that you receive. So, every center, the summary of what we’ve captured from these annual reports and from the center managers. We want to give that back to you and give you an opportunity to review that and confirm if you have anything more to add to it. You will see that as a part of the request coming through to you as well. That might also start to address these questions we’re hearing around the annual report because that is definitely something that we have done but want to play back. Another question. It may be helpful to look through some sample questions from the survey.

Grant: We didn’t share the questions simply because we didn’t want to drop the questions on you and have no context. Soon after this, you will get the questions. It is seven questions. Like I said, they are probably questions you can answer pretty readily. We don’t expect you to spend more than 10 minutes on it. There is one question that is a bit more tailored to each center, which effectively will reiterate for example your mission statement that was found on the website or in your report or where have you, and we will ask you to simply validate as Iday mentioned just a moment ago. Is it correct? Do you want to add something that maybe your mission statement should capture? That is the only one that is really more tailored. The other questions are similar, and everyone else will get the same questions.

Iday: Most of the questionnaire is focused on capturing in detail what research-based and support-based activities your center performs and what is available at your center. Things of that nature. You will just go through levels of self capturing that and then the open question that Grant mentioned around the mission statement. Two more questions trickling in. Has the elimination of positions/roles/etc. in the field (reduction in force) been ruled out or would this remain a possibility throughout the ORD process?

Molly: I think one of the earliest talks that we gave even within ORD was that we don’t believe anybody is being underutilized at this point. We think that there are probably people that are doing more than what is on the PD. They’re doing more and some critical functions that aren’t necessarily captured in what they do. Within, ORD as a starting point, we are going by every level in our organization and looking at what a person actually does compared to what their PD says they do. And we’ve already found some positions that it’s impossible for one person to do what some of these people are doing. Yet, they’re trying to do it, and they’re working weekends and nights, and it is not healthy. And so, we want to add support to those people, so again, we don’t see elimination of positions or roles. That is not the focus of what we’re trying to do here.

Grant: Yes. I will add to this. And, again, hopefully, I am not misunderstanding the context, but in this particular context in terms of the center mapping initiative the information we’re gathering has really nothing to do with personnel levels. Again, that is a center issue. That is a director or whatever leadership. That is for them to decide. Again, this effort is just simply to know what the types of activities, functions, resources, capabilities we have out there. For example, we know that there are a lot of biostatisticians and project managers and things like that, but there are probably other capabilities that we don’t know that are in the center. Right now, we are not gathering information about personnel at the centers. Again, some of the preliminary information gathering we’ve already been given some org charts and given personnel lists and whatever it is. That’s not the focus at this point nor certainly not for reducing or anything like that. That’s again a center management leadership decision.

Iday: Okay, next question. This is a quick one. Please copy center managers on email to the center directors. We can do that, so I think that is good. Next question. HSRD COINS are beginning to prepare for their renewals over the next nine months or so. As part of this process, mission statements may be revised. How should this be communicated?

Molly: I don’t think Chris is on anymore, but I think I would defer to him. Grant, what are your thoughts on that?

Grant: I think, again, you're going to get the current state. Again, questions that will be regards to the current state. I mean, if you have some plans, I think it is fair to address them. Of course, anything you provide in this questionnaire is not going to go towards any center renewal review or anything like that. This is kind of separate from that, but if you feel there is something you want to communicate, like we said earlier, this is an opportunity to communicate your ideas or plans. Again, I think it is important to keep in mind that we’re trying to capture current state right now. We realize that for those COINS, especially if you're going through renewal processes, you have some things in mind. We will just encourage you to use discretion as the information provides so that we get an accurate state, and we hope again that we might gather more information as we go forward.

Iday: Next question. Will part of this be a reconsideration of funding levels for different types of research studies and core budgets for centers?

Molly: I will talk about the core budgets for centers. If there is a function that your center performs that is something that could be leveraged, and I will use the example that I use all the time, which is Grant’s CSP Smart Team, which is an incredible regulatory resource for FDA trials right now usually limited to CSP studies. I certainly am someone who is involved in regulatory and policy and all of that. I would love to see the smart team get additional resources to be able to provide that level of support for all FDA regulated clinical trials across the enterprise. For something like that, we’re looking at how can we or what would it take to give the smart team enough resources that they would be able to manage for the entire enterprise.

Grant: I will just add to that. Again, part of this effort is to help us do some analysis and planning. Obviously, we can’t determine what future budgets will be. Molly just gave an example of a desired state, but we have look at a number of factors to determine that. I think to add something, which is not specific to this question, but it is something that Rachel has brought up. When she was at a recent meeting where there was one group of centers – I won’t name groups, but you can probably figure it out – one group of centers said they had no idea what another group of centers were doing from a different program or different service. And it was a bit amazing to me to hear that because I know in another context those centers work together or at least similar types of centers that work together. So, there are a lot of unknowns at this point. Again, that will help us determine how do we best leverage or increase funding if we have the ability or again communicate what it is that we might need and opportunities we have.

Iday: Those were the last of the questions in the Q&A. Thank you Chris, Grant, and Molly to help us cover through that. Let’s give the team a couple of minutes in case they have any last-minute questions. As they think through that, Molly, Chris, or Grant, anything else to address?

Grant: I will just say, again, one of the things that hopefully you’ve heard in other context that as we go through the organizational realignment and enterprise transformation our desire here certainly in the central office team was to engage the field. We weren’t going to make unilateral decisions without you. We weren’t just going to make decisions that impacted you and your future, so we hope that this was seen as consistent with that commitment to engage you, to inform you. Again, we realize this webinar was put together on relatively short notice, but we hope that, as we continue forward, we will have more opportunities to engage you. And to the center managers who are on this call again, hopefully, you're seeing more of our – when we ask to meet with you folks and get your input, we really are trying to get a perspective that we might not have otherwise. We really do thank you for your time and your responses that you will be hopefully providing us soon.

Molly: I have nothing to add. That was a perfect closing. Thank you, Grant.

Iday: With that, that will wrap up the Q&A for now. As Grant mentioned, our desire is to continue to keep the lines of communication and engagement open. Hopefully, this is one of several of them. Let me go back to the content just to recap our next steps. With that, we can wrap this up. Regarding next steps, this is just a recap of what we talked about. Today we just wrapped up this webinar. Hopefully, you all found this helpful. We certainly found the questions helpful, so appreciate the time and the partnership and the open communication here. As mentioned, tomorrow by end of day, the center leaders will receive an email with the questionnaire as well as a link to the recording of this webinar. That will start the week-long process for us to gather the responses. Your center manager will be copied. They will your source of support of you go through this. You can also reach out to us if you have any questions as you complete this, and please engage your whole centers even though one person receives the email in completing this. This is a key step in helping us understand more about what the centers do. Thank you for your time today and your participation in this process.

Grant: Thanks everyone. Have a great afternoon.

Molly: Thanks everybody.