

SimLEARN Speed Networking Event Improves Program Communication and Understanding

VA's Simulation Learning, Evaluation, Assessment, and Research Network (SimLEARN) conducted an All-Employee Survey that revealed growth and communication were among the top priorities for its staff members. In response, Eric Bruns, SimLEARN Executive Director, implemented a new effort to better connect staff, resulting in a dynamic Speed Networking Event – Let's Flamingle! 44 SimLEARN employees, 32 in person and 12 virtually, came together on September 12th at the National Sim VET Center in Orlando, FL., and participated in this unique opportunity to connect, learn about each other's work, and explore potential avenues for collaboration.

The event was designed with several key goals in mind:

- **Network in a Fun Environment:** Attendees engaged with one another in a relaxed, enjoyable setting, fostering a deeper understanding of each other's work.
- **Create Stronger Ambassadors for SimLEARN:** By connecting staff with a broader network within the organization, attendees were empowered to become more knowledgeable and more effective ambassadors for SimLEARN.
- **Deepen Connections with Leadership:** The event provided a platform to strengthen relationships and enhance communication channels across all platforms.
- **Teambuilding for Success:** The event emphasized the importance of both functional and relational human factors in building a successful team.

The event was guided by Dr. Elizabeth Nunez, Dr. Troy Seidl, and Dr. Thuy Boardman, who developed the idea and theme to ensure a productive experience for all participants. The event embraced an "End of Summer Tropical Party" theme, adding a festive and vibrant atmosphere to the networking experience. The schedule featured two rounds of speed networking, during which participants used guided conversation starters to learn about each other's work and current projects.

"I'm a new Associate Director, so getting to know everyone and how they influence my team is powerful," said Shannon Swain, Associate Director of SimLEARN's Clinical Training & Engagement portfolio.

As the event kicked off there was palpable positive energy in the room. Participants were encouraged to discuss future collaboration possibilities and set the stage for future follow-up connections, which many came away doing. The room was full of laughter, deep questions, and thoughtful answers that allowed many staff to connect and discover new ways that they could better collaborate with each other, developing concrete plans for follow-ups. At the end, SimLEARN staff who attended felt better connected to their coworkers and more comfortable asking for help and support from each other.

"This event was beyond what we expected... it helps take our culture to the next level and understand who we are as a team," said Bruns.