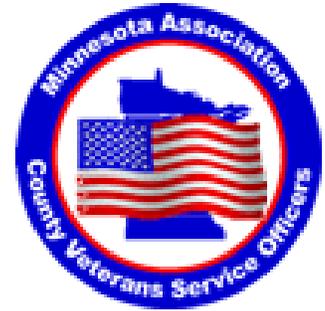


Report to the Legislature: The County Veterans Service Offices Working Group



January 15, 2009

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INTRODUCTION

The County Veterans Service Working Group was created by 2008 legislation for the purpose of reviewing the findings and recommendations of the 2008 Office of the Legislative Auditor's (OLA) report on the County Veterans Service Offices (CVSOs). The composition of the Working Group included Senator Sharon Erickson Ropes (DFL); Senator David Hann (R); Representative Al Juhnke (DFL); Representative Steve Smith (R); Mike Pugliese, Deputy Commissioner of Programs and Services, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA); Reggie Worlds, Senior Director of Programs and Services, MDVA; Christine Kiel, Legislative Director, MDVA; Brad Lindsay, President, Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Offices (MACVSO); Jim Goltart, Vice President, MACVSO; Milt Schoen, Legislative Chair, MACVSO; Dean Ascheman, Chair, Commanders Task Force (CTF); Dave Rooney, Minnesota Inter-County Association (MICA); and Tom Warmka, Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC).

The CVSO Working Group was tasked with providing recommendations to the Legislature as to whether, and to what extent, the OLA report's findings should be addressed. The Working Group was free to propose draft legislation if deemed necessary and suggest additional recommendations that would enhance the services the CVSOs provide Minnesota's veterans. This Working Group presented an opportunity for parties with a vested interest in the veteran community – CVSOs, legislators, county commissioners, MDVA, and members of veterans' service organizations – to discuss procedures and policies that would improve the timely delivery of benefits and services to veterans throughout the 87 counties. It was not the intent of the Working Group to criticize the CVSOs or to impose punitive actions of any nature. The overriding goal was to evaluate the OLA's recommendations, determine what current practices worked and which ones needed attention, develop a means of assembling collected data that can be utilized by the CVSOs to efficiently and effectively provide services, and ensure that veterans have access to the same high quality assistance throughout Minnesota.

Respectfully,
CVSO Working Group

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Report to the Legislature: County Veterans Service Offices Working Group

The following is a report on the County Veterans Service Offices by the CVSO Working Group designated by the 2008 Session Law for the time period of August 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009.

The Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) completed an Evaluation Report for the County Veterans Service Offices in January 2008. The findings were presented to the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division in February 2008. The report concluded that overall the service provided by the County Veterans Service Offices was adequate and should remain a county function; however, the OLA report offered the following recommendations (page number from original report included):

- To improve state oversight, the Legislature should amend Minnesota statutes to clarify the Department of Veterans Affairs' oversight role regarding county veterans service offices (p. 52).
- The Legislature should require that county veterans service officers be certified by the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs as a condition of their employment (p. 52).
- The Legislature should require that county boards consult with the Department of Veterans Affairs when hiring or reappointing their county veterans service officers (p. 52).
- The Legislature should require county veterans service offices to report key performance information to the Department of Veterans Affairs (p. 53).
- The Department of Veterans Affairs should include data on outcome measures in its annual report to the Legislature and annually report statewide and county-specific performance information to county boards (p. 53).
- The Department of Veterans Affairs should implement a user-friendly statewide management information system that would address both state and county needs (p. 54).
- To help ensure that enhancement grants are used effectively, the Department of Veterans Affairs should set performance goals and identify best practices for the program, as law requires (p. 54).
- The Department of Veterans Affairs should revise its training policy to give county veterans service officers the option of attending either the spring or fall conference for certification (p. 55).

- The Department of Veterans Affairs should clarify its training policy regarding the value of, and the approval process for, general technical and management-related training (p. 55).
- The Department of Veterans Affairs should explore alternative methods for administering its certification test to prevent service officers from taking the exam as a group (p. 56).
- The Department of Veterans Affairs should work with county veterans service offices to improve their web sites (p. 56).

As a result of the Office of the Legislative Auditor's report, Chairman Juhnke later introduced House File 3902 which created the CVSO Working Group. The legislation specified the following:

Creation: *"The County Veterans Service Office Working Group shall consist of the following 13 members: (1) two senators, including one member from the majority party and one member from the minority party, appointed by the Subcommittee on Committees of the Committee on Rules and Administration of the senate; (2) two members of the house of representatives, one member from the majority party and one member from the minority party, appointed by the speaker of the house; (3) the commissioner and two deputy commissioners of the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA), or the commissioner's designees; (4) the president, vice president, and legislative chair person of the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers (MACVSO); (5) the chair of the Commanders Task Force of Minnesota's congressionally-chartered veterans service organizations, or the chair's designee; (6) one person from the Minnesota Inter-County Association (MICA), as designated by the association board; and (7) one person from the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), as designated by the association board."*

Duties: *"The Working Group must meet periodically to review the findings and recommendations of the 2008 report of the Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) on Minnesota's county veterans service offices, and make written recommendations to the legislature regarding whether and how each of that report's recommendations should be implemented. The Working Group may also provide additional recommendations on how to enhance the current services provided by the county veterans service offices. The Working Group may suggest draft legislation for legislative consideration. By January 15, 2009, the Working Group must report its proposed recommendations to the chairs of the senate and house committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs, state governmental operations, and local government affairs."*

Administrative Provisions: *"The commissioner of veterans affairs, or the commissioner's designee, must convene the initial meeting of the Working Group. Upon request of the Working Group, the commissioner must provide meeting space and administrative services for the group."*

The members of the Working Group must elect a chair or co-chairs from the legislative members of the Working Group at the initial meeting. Each subsequent meeting is at the call of the chair or co-chairs. Public members of the Working Group serve without special compensation or special payment of expenses from the Working Group. The Working Group expires on June 30, 2009, unless an extension is authorized by law by that date."

Deadline for Appointments and Designations: *"The appointments and designations authorized by this section must be completed by August 1, 2008. The Working Group must convene its initial meeting no later than September 1, 2008".*

Working Group Creation Outcomes:

To carry out the intent of the Legislature, the following appointments were made to the CVSO Working Group:

Senators: Sharon Erickson Ropes (DFL) and David Hann (R)

Representatives: Al Juhnke (DFL) and Steve Smith (R)

Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs: Deputy Commissioner of Programs and Services Michael Pugliese, Senior Director of Programs and Services Reggie Worlds, and Legislative Director Christine Kiel

Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers: President Brad Lindsay, Vice President Jim Goltart, and Legislative Liaison Milt Schoen

The Minnesota Commanders Task Force: Chairman Dean Ascherman

Minnesota Inter-County Association: Director of Dakota County Community Services Dave Rooney and Chair of Anoka County Board of Commissioners Dennis Berg

Association of Minnesota Counties: Faribault County Commissioner Tom Warmka

Administrative Provisions Outcomes:

The initial CVSO Working Group was convened by Commissioner Clark Dyrud on August 25, 2008.

- Commissioner Dyrud called the meeting to order. Representative Al Juhnke placed into consideration Senator Sharon Erickson Ropes and Representative Steve Smith to serve as co-chairs, and all present voted and agreed upon co-chairs. Future meeting dates were set for the third Monday of each month, and the full Working Group was to read the OLA report and come back with their suggestions for the next meeting. The full Working Group determined that in order to best complete the tasks given, they would divide the OLA list of recommendations into Sub-groups (*See Attachment #1*). All members of the full Working Group could volunteer for any Sub-group of their choosing. The CVSOs are to provide their Mission Statement to the full Working Group at the next meeting.

Sub-group Meeting held September 18, 2008.

- Members of the Sub-group developed a general CVSO Position Description. The Sub-group agreed that the Position Description would be brought forth to the full Working Group for their consideration. In addition, the Sub-group developed a CVSO Staffing formula based on the veteran population specific to each county.
*NOTE: At the convening date, this task was not assigned to a Sub-group. The group met to establish a Mission Statement for the MACVSO and a Position Description. The two tasks were needed before a discussion of the OLA recommendations could take place.

Working Group Meeting held September 22, 2008.

- Senator Sharon Erickson Ropes called the meeting to order.
- Jo Vos from the Office of the Legislative Auditor presented the January 2008 report.
- The Sub-group reported back to the full Working Group on the CVSO Mission Statement (*See Attachment #2*), CVSO to Veteran Staffing ratio and the CVSO Position Description (*See Attachment #3*).
- The full Working Group reviewed and discussed the Position Description, made some modifications, and ultimately adopted it as a “best practice” for counties to follow.
- The CVSO to Veteran Staffing ratio was discussed and tabled for future consideration. It was agreed that by the next meeting MDVA will have surveyed the County Veterans Service Officers on their current staffing levels.

Working Group Meeting held October 27, 2008.

- Representative Al Juhnke called the meeting to order. Deputy Commissioner Pugliese reported to the full Working Group the outcome of the CVSO Staffing surveys, 28 counties had yet to report their staffing levels.
- Another request was submitted to the remaining counties for completion of the surveys, including the last VA census information with veteran population.
- As discussed, the full Working Group divided the list of recommendations into Sub-groups, and decided that anyone interested in serving on a particular Sub-group should contact Christine Kiel.

Working Group Meeting held November 18, 2008.

- Senator Sharon Erickson Ropes called the meeting to order.
- Nicole Peine, Management Analyst 2 for MDVA, was introduced to the Working Group and will assume administrative duties.
- An update on the CVSO Staffing survey was provided with 16 counties yet to report. Brad Lindsay, President of MACVSO, ensured that he would get all remaining surveys to MDVA for inclusion on the CVSO Staffing spreadsheet (*See Attachment #4*).

- Sub-groups reported on activities to date. The full Working Group meeting ended and discussion on Sub-group #3 immediately follow.

Sub-group #3 (Reporting Requirements) Meeting held November 18, 2008.

- All attendees of the full Work Group participated in the discussion of Sub-group #3, and it was decided to continue the discussion at the next meeting.

Sub-group #3 (Reporting Requirements) Meeting held December 15, 2008.

- Senator Sharon Erickson Ropes called the meeting to order.
- Sub-group #3 identified reporting goals and discussed the Who, What, Where, When, Why and How of the goals chosen.
- The CVSOs will choose what they feel is important to report to their county commissioners and the Legislature on an annual basis.
- MACVSO will provide an annual report to MDVA.
- An ongoing misconception within MACVSO that the state would be assuming the responsibilities of complete oversight of CVSO operations were discussed. The Sub-group agreed that it is not seeking the transfer of power to the state from the counties regarding the oversight role.

Working Group Meeting held December 15, 2008.

- Sub-group #3 reported that further discussion regarding the topic is required.
- For the next meeting, scheduled for January 5, 2009, the CVSO members are to provide a list of reportable activities and/or services they provide in their county.

Working Group Meeting held January 5, 2009.

- The Working Group reviewed the drafted report to the Legislature and made suggestions and comments.
- The report will be re-drafted and sent out to all Working Group members for their final suggestions before the next meeting.
- The Working Group is to bring any other ideas they may have to the meeting.

Working Group Meeting held January 12, 2009.

- Suggestions regarding Sub-group #2 on Training/Education were addressed and a proposed list of Veterans Service Office activities was presented to the group by Brad Lindsay. Suggestions were made regarding this document, and the changes were incorporated.
- Brad Lindsay volunteered to present the CVSO Working Group Report to the Legislature, along with Michael Pugliese.

Summary:

While it has been difficult to meet with all members of the Working Group, attendance has been respectable. As previously noted, the full Working Group determined that in order to complete the tasks given, the list of OLA recommendations was divided into smaller, more manageable Sub-groups. Sub-groups and their tasks and actions to date are summarized below:

Sub-group #1 - Oversight

Recommended Action: “To improve state oversight, the Legislature should amend Minnesota statutes to clarify the Department of Veterans Affairs’ oversight role regarding County Veterans Service Offices”.

Working Group Recommendation: The Sub-group agreed that it is not seeking the transfer of power to the state from the counties regarding the oversight role. The Department’s role with regard to CVSOs oversight is a very complex issue that will require ongoing discussion.

Rationale: To move forward in a productive manner, the Working Group agreed the discussion of the oversight would be removed by agreeing to no change in oversight; however, the Working Group will address the statutory ambiguities regarding oversight at a later date.

Recommended Action: “The Legislature should require that county boards consult with the Department of Veterans Affairs when hiring or reappointing their county veterans service officers”.

Working Group Recommendation: The Working Group reached consensus that while it should be a “best practice” for counties to consult with MDVA when hiring County Veterans Service Officers; they felt that it should not be a mandate. They also agreed that MDVA should play no role with regard to reappointing County Veterans Service Officers.

Rationale: The Working Group felt it should not be a mandate because CVSOs are county employees, and while the Department will remain a partner and participate when requested by a county, MDVA will not be taking the lead.

***NOTE:** Over the past three years MDVA has been invited to participate in many selection committees for new CVSOs.

Sub-group #2 – Training/Education

Recommended Action: “The Legislature should require that county veterans service officers be certified by the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs as a condition of their employment”.

Working Group Recommendation: The full Working Group agreed that CVSOs certification, through MDVA, should not be a condition of employment.

Rationale: CVSOs are county employees; therefore the counties should be the ones to dictate their training and certification requirements for conditions of employment.

***NOTE:** MDVA does require CVSOs to be certified to be eligible to receive either the Operational and/or Enhancement Grants. Over the

past two years, only two out of 87 CVSOs did not receive certification, therefore MDVA did not feel that making certification mandatory was necessary.

Recommended Action: “The Department of Veterans Affairs should revise its training policy to give county veteran service officers the option of attending either the spring or fall conference for certification”.

Working Group Recommendation: This recommendation was considered and addressed by MDVA, in consultation with MACVSO, prior to the establishment of the CVSO Working Group. It was decided there is no mandatory requirement to attend either conference.

Rationale: The Department had already implemented this before the recommendation came from the OLA and the Working Group agreed to this implementation.

Recommended Action: “The Department of Veterans Affairs should clarify its training policy regarding the value of, and the approval process for, general technical and management-related training”.

Working Group Recommendation: This and the following OLA recommendation is no longer applicable as MDVA and MACVSO have developed a new training and certification requirement that the full Working Group has adopted. There is an ongoing cost for this process, but the initial implementation has already been partially funded by a grant from MDVA. This grant will pay for all CVSOs to attend the NACVSO accreditation training while the National Conference is here in June 2010. However, newly hired CVSOs will need to be provided this training by either attending the annual NACVSO National Conference or by having contract trainers come to Minnesota on an annual basis.

Rationale: The National Association of County Veterans Service Officers provides structured training for CVSOs for which a CVSO can receive certification and accreditation. The Working Group recommended taking advantage of national training opportunities (*See Attachment #5*).

Recommended Action: “The Department of Veterans Affairs should explore alternative methods for administering its certification test to prevent service officers from taking the exam as a group”.

Working Group Recommendation: The testing of CVSOs will be provided by the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers.

Rationale: Oversight of the testing process would be streamlined by the management of NACVSO. With their in-depth testing in areas directly applicable to the CVSO Mission, NACVSO would be a great asset to the CVSOs.

Sub-group #3 – Reporting

The OLA recommendations under this sub-group have garnered the most discussion among the Working Group members. At this time, there is no agreement on a Working Group recommendation. The members of the Working Group will continue to discuss this matter. The comments below are a reflection of the work that has been done to date.

Recommended Action: “The Legislature should require county veteran service offices to report key performance information to the Department of Veterans Affairs”.

Working Group Recommendation: This and the following OLA recommendation are still being considered by the full Working Group. However, consensus has been reached that reporting will occur, but what will be reported is still under consideration. Whatever reporting requirements come about as a result of the Work Group will come through the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers. The MACVSO will provide annual reports to the Legislature, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, and their county commissioners.

Rationale: Rationale will be forthcoming as the Working Group completes its work.

Recommended Action: “The Department of Veterans Affairs should include data on outcome measures in its annual report to the Legislature and annually report statewide and county-specific performance information to county boards”.

Working Group Recommendation: See above

Rationale: Rationale will be forthcoming as the Working Group completes its work.

Recommended Action: “The Department of Veterans Affairs should implement a user-friendly statewide management information system that would address both state and county needs”.

Working Group Recommendation: Prior to the establishment of the CVSO Working Group, MDVA implemented a new user-friendly statewide management information system (Virtual Veteran) that came online in May 2008. To date, 28 counties have purchased the program. Many of the 28 counties utilized MDVA’s Enhancement Grant program to purchase the Virtual Veteran software (*See Attachment #6*).

Rationale: Virtual Veteran provides a groundbreaking management information system designed to save resources and create efficiencies statewide, while maintaining the highest level of security of sensitive materials.

Sub-group #4 – Enhancement Grants

Recommended Action: “To help ensure that enhancement grants are used effectively, the Department of Veterans Affairs should set performance goals and identify best practices for the program, as law requires”.

Working Group Recommendation: The Department worked with the Office of Grants Management in the Department of Administration and implemented changes to the Enhancement Grant program for the FY09 grant cycle which began July 2, 2008 (*See Attachment #7*).

Rationale: Since the Department worked with the Department of Administration to adopt performance goals and best practices to meet statewide guidelines, the Working Group agreed with the changes to the program.

Sub-group #5 – Websites

Recommended Action: “The Department of Veterans Affairs should work with county veterans service offices to improve their web sites”.

Working Group Recommendation: MDVA Information Technology staff has been working closely with MACVSO on improving and supporting the MACVSO website. This task will be completed by the expiration date the Legislature set for June 30, 2009.

Rationale: MACVSO has purchased a URL address www.macvso.org. MDVA’s Information Technology staff will assist and create, maintain, and promote the CVSO’s website.

Conclusion:

A significant amount of work has been accomplished to improve the partnership and effectiveness of MDVA and MACVSO. To date, seven of the eleven OLA recommendations have been addressed by the Working Group. While the remaining four OLA recommendations require additional discussion and consensus, the Working Group expects to complete its assignment by the expiration date set in law (June 30, 2009). As the remaining OLA recommendations are complex and will require ongoing dialogue, the Working Group may seek legislation extend the deadline.

Attachments:

- Attachment #1: List of recommendations by Sub-groups
- Attachment #2: CVSO Mission Statement
- Attachment #3: CVSO Position Description
- Attachment #4: CVSO Staffing Survey spreadsheet
- Attachment #5: Information for NACVSO Training and Accreditation, Course Description, and CUE Form
- Attachment #6: Virtual Veterans
- Attachment #7: CVSO Enhancement Grants and Introduction to Program Outcomes – Grant Programs for Veterans FY’09
- Attachment #8: All Meeting Minutes

County Veterans Service Offices

OLA Recommendations:

Sub-group#1 – Oversight

Committee Members: Sen. David Hann, Rep. Al Juhnke, Rep. Steve Smith, Michael Pugliese, Reggie Worlds, Brad Lindsay, Milt Schoen, Jim Goltart, Dean Ascherman, and Rob Gross.

- To improve state oversight, the Legislature should amend Minnesota Statutes to clarify the Department of Veterans Affairs oversight role regarding County Veterans Service Offices.
- The Legislature should require counties to consult with the Department of Veterans Affairs when hiring or reappointing their veterans service officers.

Sub-group #2 – Training/Education

Lead: Michael Pugliese

Committee Members: Michael Pugliese, Reggie Worlds, Christine Kiel, Brad Lindsay, Jim Goltart, and Milt Schoen.

- The Legislature should require that County Veterans Service Officers be certified by the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs as a condition of employment.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs should revise its training policy to give County Veterans Service Officers the option of attending either the spring or fall conferences for certification.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs should clarify its training policy regarding the value of, and the approval process for, general technical and management related training.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs should explore alternative methods for administering its certification test to prevent Service Officers from taking the exam as a group.

Sub-group #3 – Reporting

Lead: Reggie Worlds

Committee Members: Sen. Sharon Erickson-Ropes, Rep. Steve Smith, Reggie Worlds, Christine Kiel, Dean Ascheman, Tom Warmka, Charlie Dempewolf, and Rob Gross.

- The Legislature should require County Veterans Service Officers to collect and report key performance information to the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs.
- The Department should include data on outcome measures in its annual report to the Legislature and also report such data to County Boards annually.
- The Department should implement a user-friendly statewide management information system; Service Offices should implement and use the same system.

Sub-group #4 – Enhancement Grants

Lead: Christine Kiel

Committee Members: Michael Pugliese and Reggie Worlds

- To help ensure the enhancement grants are used effectively, the Department of Veterans Affairs should set performance goals and identify best practices for the program.

Sub-group #5 – Websites

- The Department should work with County Veterans Service Offices to improve their websites.

The Minnesota County Veterans Service Officer's Mission Statement

To work collaboratively with the Department of Veterans Affairs and nationally chartered veterans service organizations in promoting the interests and welfare of veterans, who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States of America, their dependents and survivors. To enhance the quality of their lives through advising, counseling, claims assistance, education, advocacy, and special programs. To ensure that they each receive all of the benefits and services that they so well deserve for the sacrifices they have endured.

**SUGGESTED POSITION DESCRIPTION FOR A
COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER**

NECESSARY QUALIFICATIONS

(Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 197)

- Residence in the State of Minnesota.
- Citizenship in the United States.
- A veteran as defined in Minnesota Statutes, Section 197.447, "Veteran" means a citizen of the United States or a resident alien who has been separated under honorable conditions from any branch of the armed forces of the United States after having served on active duty for 181 consecutive days or by reason of disability incurred while serving on active duty, or who has met the minimum active duty requirement as defined by Code of Federal Regulations, title 38, section [3.12a](#), or who has active military service certified under section 401, Public Law 95-202. The active military service must be certified by the United States secretary of defense as active military service and a discharge under honorable conditions must be issued by the secretary.

DESIRABLE QUALIFICATIONS & CERTIFICATIONS

- Bachelor's degree
- One to two years related experience and/or training
- A combination of education, training and experience that provides the required knowledge, skills and abilities to perform in this position.
- Certification as a County Veterans Service Officer according to Minnesota Statute Chapter 197.
- Accreditation as a representative of one or more Veteran's Service Organizations recognized by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

ESSENTIAL DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES:

- I. **Advise and assist veterans/dependents in applying for and evaluating available federal benefits from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, either by initiating or reopening claims.**
 - A. Complete initial application, or reopen existing claims, for compensation (service-connected disabilities) or pension (non-service-connected disability).
 - B. Research medical conditions and obtain necessary medical records and statements from physicians to support the claim(s).
 - C. Obtain necessary financial information and corroborating information and documents from the veteran's military buddies, family members, or other sources.
 - D. File application for eligible veterans for education under the GI Bill, or for vocational rehabilitation.

- E. Contact and assist survivors of a deceased veteran in obtaining death benefits such as burial in a national cemetery, burial allowances, government grave marker, government life insurance proceeds and survivor benefits.
- F. Advise and assist veterans on all phases of government life insurance.
- G. Veterans Administration home loan benefits.
- H. Ensure that all timelines are met so the veteran does not lose any potential benefits.
- I. Keep in contact VA Officials and the veteran's Power of Attorney (POA) concerning the status of individual claims.
- II. Advise and assist veterans/dependents in appealing denied claims to the local VA Regional Office (VARO), the local Decision Review Officers, or the Board of Veterans Appeals in Washington D.C.**
 - A. Assist veterans in obtaining medical, financial, or other information necessary for the appeal.
 - B. Assist veterans in preparation for personal hearings at the VARO, to include accompanying them to the hearing, if necessary.
 - C. Ensure all timelines are met so the veteran does not lose any potential benefits.
- III. Advise and assist veterans in obtaining necessary inpatient and outpatient care from the VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) and Community Based Outreach Clinics (CBOCs).**
 - A. Do all required paperwork, and obtain all necessary records for the VAMCs or CBOCs to accept the veteran for care as an inpatient or outpatient.
 - B. Work with the VAMCs or CBOCs to schedule necessary appointments for the veteran.
 - C. Assist veteran in obtaining transportation to the VAMCs or CBOCs.
 - D. Work with VA professional in obtaining public health services, home health care, or placement in local nursing homes or the Minnesota Veterans Homes.
- IV. Advise and assist veterans/dependents in evaluating and applying for available state benefits from the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA), by initiating or reopening claims.**
 - A. Complete initial application, or reopen existing claims, for state benefits for veterans and their dependents
 - B. Appeal denied claims when appropriate.
 - C. Ensure that the veterans and dependents in the county are aware of these benefits.
- V. Advise and assist military retirees and their dependents or survivors in evaluating and obtaining their benefits from the Department of Defense (DOD).**

- A. Assist in applying for or troubleshooting military retiree benefits, or other problems that arise.
- B. Advises retirees in medical insurance benefits or TRICARE, and helps in filing of those claims.
- C. Help retirees or their dependents with military I.D. Card applications.

VI. Advise and assist veterans in claims and proceedings involving the military services.

- A. Assist a veteran in applying for a correction of military records or an upgrade of character of separation from the service.
- B. Investigate history of unit, through Department of Defense, to prove that Veteran was in a combat zone, or a specific battle, to qualify for specific benefits.

VII. Advise, assist and evaluate non-veteran specific programs that veterans and their dependents or survivors may obtain benefits or services from and make referrals to these agencies.

- A. Advises veterans and their dependents on services from Social Security, Small Business Administration, and other agencies.
- B. Works with the County Human Services Department to maximize ALL potential benefits.
- C. Assists veterans in obtaining help from local hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes.

VIII. Attends workshops, seminars, and conferences and confers with professionals and government officials in order to keep up to date on the latest changes in Federal and State laws and regulations.

- A. Keeps current on legislative and legal actions of federal and state veterans benefits.
- B. Lobby elected government officials and advocate for legislation beneficial to veterans and their dependents.
- C. To be eligible for the periodic CVSO Operational Improvement and CVSO Enhancement Grants, the CVSO should maintain annual certification by the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) which requires:
 - i. Obtaining the minimum of nine (9) continuing education units necessary for annual certification by MDVA.

- IX. Advise and assist members and dependents of the National Guard and Reserve Components in obtaining appropriate benefits and assistance.**
- A. Provide information to deployed service members and their dependents about assistance programs during deployment and benefits upon return from active duty.
 - B. Attend and speak at information meetings for service members and their families.
 - C. Work with Family Assistance Centers in obtaining help for deployed service member's families.
- X. Markets information about and advocates for veterans benefits and services within the county.**
- A. Serves as the county's liaison to and appears before the county veterans organizations to brief members on current information on veterans benefits.
 - B. Speaks to other community organizations at their request.
 - C. Provides information to county media about veterans benefits.
- XI. Supervises and ensures the keeping of office records, including file generation, privacy provisions, and retention policy and standards.**
- A. Maintains confidential records in accordance with all the requirements of the data privacy laws and HIPAA.
 - B. Maintains record retention according to written policy for the county.
 - C. Responsible for the office's information management systems.
- XII. Performs county-requested duties.**
- A. Attends meetings with the County Board of Commissioners to communicate caseloads, trends or factual information; meets with other supervisory personnel to coordinate services.
 - B. Compiles reports for the County Board of Commissioners regarding office activities and the State under current statutory requirements.
 - C. Develops and operates within the annual Veterans Services budget with the approval of the County Board of Commissioners.
 - D. Orders supplies and services for the Veterans Service Office.
 - E. Prepares grant applications to State and Federal agencies for special projects and equipment when available.
 - F. Performs other duties as requested.

SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES (IF APPLICABLE)

- Directly supervises Assistant County Veterans Service Officers, Administrative Assistants, Secretaries, Veterans Technicians, Veterans Van Drivers, and volunteer drivers.
- Carries out supervisory responsibilities in accordance with the county's policies and applicable laws.
- Responsibilities include interviewing, hiring, and training employees; planning, assigning, and directing work; appraising performance; rewarding and disciplining employees; addressing complaints and resolving problems.

RELATIONSHIPS

- This position must maintain a proper working relationship with clients, many who have complex physical and mental health issues and come from diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds
- Employees of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
- Other federal and state agencies working with veterans
- Other County Veterans Service Officers and their staff
- Other agencies and departments to include recorder's office, judges, lawyers, doctors/nurses, hospitals, nursing homes, human services department, banks, local chapters and posts of the veterans organizations, referral agencies, Department of Defense and Military Service Departments, State employment offices, Public Health Offices, Funeral Homes, Police and Sheriff Offices, medical and legal professionals, and the general public.
- It is also necessary to maintain good relationships with the staff within the County.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES

Extensive knowledge of:

- Federal rules, regulations, and statutes of the VA and MDVA
- Case law of the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims
- Etiology and relationship of medical conditions
- Medical terminology, human anatomy, and physiology
- Social Security, Medicare, and all need-based federal and state programs

Skills:

- Read, analyze, and interpret common scientific and technical journals, financial reports, and legal documents
- Respond to common inquiries or, complaints from customers, regulatory agencies, or members of the business community
- Write speeches and articles for publication that conform to prescribed style and format
- Effectively present information to top management, public groups, or other groups
- Work with and apply mathematical concepts, such as fractions, percentages, ratios, and proportions, to practical situations.
- Define problems, collect data, establish facts, and draw valid conclusions.
- Interpret an extensive variety of technical instructions and deal with abstract and concrete variables.

Ability to:

- Understand, interpret, and apply federal laws and regulations
- Understand and interpret medical records and statements
- Prepare written statements on behalf of claimants
- Assist in preparation of oral presentations on behalf of claimants
- Express technical information in clear oral or written manner

- Counsel and advise distraught claimants, some whom are mentally ill and/or chemically dependent
- Possess the organizational skills to handle multiple complex claims simultaneously
- Get along in a professional manner with clients, co-workers, and other personnel
- Use pc's for word processing, veteran's database programs, and other appropriate software
- Push and pull five- high file drawers regularly.

PROBLEM SOLVING

An employee in this position:

- Since each claim is unique, individual judgment and strategy is necessary in determining the best course of action for each veteran or dependent
- Must be able to inquire into, troubleshoot, and expedite claims when necessary
- Must be able to problem solve complex cases arbitrarily utilizing comprehensive knowledge of all pertinent rules, regulations, and statutes
- Must review each action or decision thoroughly to ensure that it was done correctly

FREEDOM TO ACT

An employee in this position is responsible for the performance of all aspects of this job. The freedom to act is limited only by the legal restraints of the benefits sought and the desires of the County Board (or their appointed representative).

CVSO STAFFING SURVEY

Attachment #4

COUNTY	VET Pop*	NUMBER of FTEs and ROLE	HOURS WORKED	ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES	COMMENTS
Aitkin	2,415	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	8 Hours	Yes	
Anoka	26,694	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		2 Deputy Directors	40 Hours ea.	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
Becker	3,286	CVSO	40+ Hours	None	
		Office Manager	40 Hours	None	
Beltrami	3,692	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	24 Hours	None	
Benton	3,141	CVSO	40 Hours	Safety	
		Administrative Support	12 Hours	Admin. Pool Secretary; 30% to CVSO office	
Big Stone	501	CVSO	16 Hours	None	168 hrs mtgs/training = 1000 hrs/yr
Blue Earth	4,608	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
Brown	2,408	CVSO	45+ Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	Sorts county mail and assists County Assessor	
Carlton	3,237	CVSO	37.5 Hours	None	Full-time w/overtime budget
		Deputy VSO/Admin. Asst.	37.5 Hours	None	
		Admin. Asst./Van Driver	37.5 Hours	None	
Carver	5,021	CVSO	40+ Hours	None	
		Veterans Technician	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	20 Hours	None	Filling position
		3 Van Drivers	40 Hours total	None	16 hrs/16 hrs/8 hrs for 40 hrs. total
Cass	3,540	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Veterans Benefits Spec.	40 Hours	None	
Chippewa	1,082	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
Chisago	4,186	CVSO	40 Hours	Also Director of Emergency Management	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	Shared with Parks Dept and County Extension Office	
Clay	4,212	CVSO	40-60 Hours	None	.5 Admin. Support requested
		Veterans Benefits Coordinator	40 Hours	None	
		Non-Paid Volunteer			Pending County approval

Clearwater	889	CVSO	40+ Hours	Also County Safety Controls Coordinator	
Cook	588	CVSO	15 Hours	None	
Cottonwood	997	CVSO	40 Hours	Also Deputy Emergency Management Director	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	Also works for Environmental office	
Crow Wing	6,287	CVSO	40 Hours	Other responsibilities for 4 hours/week	
		Veteran Services Specialist	40 Hours	None	
Dakota	30,069	CVSO	40 Hours	None	Supervisor & caseworker
		3 Senior Service Officers	40 Hours ea.	None	Caseworkers
		Service Officer*	40 Hours	Caseworker Trainee	*'08 Grant, also asking for '09
		IT Liaison	40 Hours	Lead for all automated systems, also clerical duties	
		2 Administrative Support	40 Hours ea.	None	
Dodge	1,504	CVSO	32 Hours	None	No assigned admin. staff
Douglas	3,556	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	4/5 Time	1/5 time (7.5 hours) for Public Health	30 out of 37.5 hour workweek
Faribault	1,452	CVSO	37.5+ Hours	None	37.5 hours is full-time
		Administrative Support	37.5 Hours	None	
Fillmore	1,733	CVSO	20 Hours	.5 Emergency Management Director	
		Administrative Support	20 Hours	.5 Emergency Management Deputy	
		Assistant CVSO	20 Hours	.5 time hired by Grant County	2009 Fillmore will pay
Freeborn	2,944	CVSO	40 Hours	None	2 volunteer van drivers
		Veterans Benefits Spec.	40 Hours	None	
Goodhue	4,199	CVSO	40 Hours	Sr. Management Team; Leg. Liaison; Risk Management Dir.	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
Grant	573	CVSO	24 Hours	Douglas County Cytotechnologist 32 Hours/wk	
Hennepin	75,731	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		6 Veterans Service Reps.	40 Hours ea.	None	
		Senior Admin. Asst.	40 Hours	None	
		Office Specialist III	40 Hours	None	
Houston	1,971	CVSO	40+ Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	20 Hours	Job Shares w/ Zoning, Feedlots, Solid Waste	
Hubbard	2,424	CVSO	20 Hours	20 Hours Emergency Management Director	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	Also administrative/receptionist, County Extension Office	
Isanti	3,344	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	Job Share: 3/5 and 2/5 time to cover office	

*FY 07 VA Geographic Distribution

		Work-study Student	16 Hours		10 months/yr; on-going position
Itasca	3,344	CVSO	40+ Hours	None	
		Benefit Specialist	40 Hours	None	
Jackson	1,040	CVSO	40 + Hours	85% CVSO; 15% Emergency Management	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	55% Veteran Service; 45% Drivers License	
		Deputy EM	30 Hours	95% EM; 5% Drivers License	
Kanabec	1,600	CVSO	35 Hours	Also Emergency Management	
Kandiyohi	3,312	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
Kittson	476	CVSO	16-18 Hours	None	
Koochiching	1,350	CVSO	30 Hours	None	
Lac Qui Parle	681	CVSO	FT 35 Hr/wk	Also County Safety Manager/Coordinator	County looking at PT asst.
Lake	1,448	CVSO	40+ Hours	2+ Hours as Lake County Motor Pool Coordinator	
Lake of the Woods	615	CVSO	20-25 Hours	None	On-call
Le Sueur	2,084	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Support Staff	40 Hours	None	
Lincoln	528	CVSO	10-15 Hours	None	Works as needed, office in store
Lyon	1,831	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	20 Hours	None	
Mahnomen	424	CVSO	20 Hours	None	
Marshall	749	CVSO	16 Hours	None	
Martin	1,981	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
McLeod	3,210	CVSO	40 Hours	Department Head functions	8 Volunteer van drivers
		Veteran Services Secretary	40 Hours	None	
Meeker	2,227	CVSO	40 Hours	Also, Meeker County Veterans Council and progra	3 volunteer van drivers
		Veteran Technician	40 Hours	None	
Mille Lacs	2,624	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	20 Hours	None	Grant allows for 20 additional hours
Morrison	3,148	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Case Aide	30 Hours	None	Assists CVSO, benefits, claims
		Office Manager/Travel Coord.	32 Hours	None	
Mower	3,703	CVSO	30 Hours	10 Hours Emergency Management Director	
		Administrative Support	30 Hours	10 Hours Emergency Management	

*FY 07 VA Geographic Distribution

Murray	799	CVSO	14-20 Hours	Emerg. Management; Inform. Systems; Safety Coordinator	
Nicollet	2,303	CVSO	40+ Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	20 Hours	None	
Nobles	1,587	CVSO	24 Hours	None	
Norman	648	CVSO	40 Hours	Also staff the Safety Office	
		Administrative Support	20 Hours	None	
Olmsted	10,299	2 CVSOs	40 Hours	None	
		Secretary/Receptionist	20 Hours	Job Shares .5 w/CVSO; .5 w/ Community Services	
Otter Tail	5,975	Director of Veteran Ser.	40 Hours	None	Hiring FT CVSO;PT admin. asst.
		CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Office Mgr./Claims Spec.	40 Hours	None	
		Admin. Asst./Transp. Coord.	40 Hours	None	
Pennington	1,187	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
Pine	2,953	CVSO	32 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	20 Hours	None	
Pipestone	751	CVSO	20 Hours	.5 time Emergency Management	
		Administrative Support	12 Hour	Share with three other departments	
Polk	2,655	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
Pope	1,157	CVSO	40 Hours	Also serves Stevens County veterans	
		Administrative Support	37.5 Hours	None	
Ramsey	34,476	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		2 Assistant CVSOs	40 Hours ea.	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
Red Lake	440	CVSO	13 Hours	None	Works out of his home
Redwood	1,422	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
Renville	1,527	CVSO	40 Hours	None	On-call PT veterans technician
		Veterans Technician	40 Hours	None	
		Van Driver	40 Hours	None	
Rice	4,576	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
Rock	761	CVSO	40 Hours	Safety	
Roseau	1,261	CVSO	32+ Hours	None	

*FY 07 VA Geographic Distribution

St Louis	18,745	CVSO	40 Hours	None	Offices in Duluth, Ely, Hibbing
		4 VSO IIs	40 Hours ea.	None	& Virginia
		4 Information Specialists	40 Hours ea.	None	
Scott	7,982	CVSO	40 Hours	None	Admin. & driver coverage for
		Program Support Specialist	40 Hours	None	vacation and conferences
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
		Driver	40 Hours	None	
Sherburne	5,942	CVSO	40+ Hours	None	
		Deputy CVSO	40+ Hours	None	
		Admin. Asst.II/Benefits Coord.	40 Hours	None	
		Admin. Asst.I/Benefits Coord.	32 Hours	None	3/4 time
		Student Intern/Spec. Project	10 Hours	None	Approx. 400 Hours/Year
Sibley	1,352	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
Stearns	11,702	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		2 Asst. VSOs	40 Hours ea.	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
Steele	2,986	CVSO	40+ Hours	None	
		2 Administrative Support	20 Hours ea.	None	Shared position
Stevens	643	Shares CVSO with Pope			
Swift	1,049	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	32 Hours	None	
Todd	2,373	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	Also union steward	
Traverse	380	CVSO	12 Hours	18 Hours Solid Waste, Recycling and Safety	Works 4 days/ 30 hours
		Administrative Support	20 Hours	.5 Solid Waste, Recycling and Safety	Full-time is 37.5 hours
Wabasha	1,954	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Assistant CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
Wadena	1,263	CVSO	36 Hours	None	
Waseca	1,805	CVSO	44 Hours	Combined w/ Emergency Management Director	
		Administrative Support	32 Hours	None	
		5 Van Drivers	PT/Temp.	None	
Washington	16,459	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Veterans Eligibility Specialist	40 Hours	32 Hours for VSO; 8 Hours for Econ. Assistance	Emergency asst. vet & non-vets

*FY 07 VA Geographic Distribution

		Veterans Eligibility Specialist	30 Hours	24 Hours for VSO; 6 Hours for Economic Assistance	Emergency asst. vet & non-vets
Watowan	898	CVSO	40 Hours	None	
		Administrative Support	37.5 Hours	.5 time with VSO and .5 time with Extension Office	
Wilkin	528	CVSO	32 Hours	None	No benefits
		Administrative Support	24 Hours	None	With benefits
Winona	3,898	CVSO	40 Hours	None	12 Volunteer van drivers
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	None	
Wright	8,118	CVSO	40 Hours	Also Civil Defense and Nuclear	
		2 Administrative Support	40 Hours ea.	None	
Yellow Medicine	882	CVSO	40 Hours	CVSO and Emergency Management	
		Administrative Support	40 Hours	VSO and Emergency Management	

Information for NACVSO Training and Accreditation

The following gives a brief description of becoming a member and accredited with NACVSO.

The first step for a CVSO is to become of member of NACVSO is to complete an application and submit it along with \$30.00. Once this is completed the member may be accredited with NACVSO after meeting the requirements. The member must attend a NACVSO Conference or Contract Training and complete the accreditation course (See Description Below) along with passing a written closed book test.

Once a member is accredited then they can apply for cross accreditation with the following organizations; Disabled American Veterans, AMVETS, Vietnam Veterans of America, TREA, Military Order of the Purple Heart.

In order to maintain accreditation with NACVSO the member must be a member in good standing and complete 16 CEU's annually in subject matter determined by the Education Committee. This training may be accomplished by attending the NACVSO Annual Conference or providing a CEU Completion form (See Attached) along with the training syllabus/agenda showing completion of 16 CEU's completed.

The NACVSO conferences are held each year normally in June somewhere in the US. One of the Member States usually hosts the conference. The cost for attending the conference is currently \$275.00 and that is being raised to \$300.00 in 2010. The individuals attending the conference pay all Room and Board and this will depend on the location of the conference. NACVSO works with the host states to ensure cost of hotels are kept as low as possible.

NACVSO TRAINING CONFERENCE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

ACCREDITATION TRAINING

Accreditation Training is a basic course with subject matter relating to the development and submission of claims for pension, compensation, other veterans entitlements. Also included is any other subject matter determined by the Education Committee to impart the knowledge required of someone who wishes to become an accredited representative as noted in Title 38 U.S.C. and other advocates wishing to improve their knowledge of the Department of Veterans Affairs Claims Process. Successful completion by attending all sessions (32 hours) and passing final exam results in award of Certificate of Completion. Certificate of Attendance will be given to those not passing or taking the final exam but have attended all sessions.

CONTINUING EDUCATION TRAINING

Continuing Education Training is an advanced course with subject matter, which includes review of Accreditation subject matter, claims adjudication, appellate process and development of complicated claims and other subject matter determined by the Education Committee to satisfy the requirements of Continuing Education Units (16) to maintain accreditation. Attendance at all sessions will result in the award of Certificate of Completion.

ADVANCED PROFESSIONAL VETERANS ADVOCATE TRAINING

Advanced Professional Veterans Advocate Training is an advanced course consisting of subject matter related to areas of knowledge required to successfully complete the requirements for the award of CERTIFIED VETERANS ADVOCATE Designation. One 8-hour course is presented on one day during the Annual Training Conference. A CEU Certificate will be given for attendance. A total of 60 hours are required to satisfy this segment of this training program. Completion of all requirements will result in the award of a Certificate of Certified Veterans Advocate (CVA). Enrollment is required for award of CVA Certificate.

INTRODUCTION TO VETERAN ADVOCACY

This is a 32-hour course of instruction designed to teach you the basics of service-connected compensation, pension, death benefits and many other VA programs, but also to motivate and inspire you in your desire to serve our veterans. Not only will we share the information about each of the VA programs; we will cover the necessary forms to be completed, why you need that form and how to fill them out line by line. You will find this course is a great learning experience and enjoyable to attend. The course is a non-accreditation course designed for the CVSO and/or Office Staff members with less than 18 months experience, ideal for the new service officer. It has been proven to be an important tool for all who are new to this business.

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY
VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS
CONTINUING EDUCATION
REQUIREMENTS**

1. Attendance of Phase 1 or 2 classes during the Annual NACVSO Conference.
(No CEU Report Required).

Or

2. Submittal, to the Education Chair designee, of **training syllabus** and **NACVSO CEU form** showing attendance, hours and subjects covered. **A minimum of 16 hours, consisting of 4 hours of compensation and pension, 2 hours of appeals, and 1 hour of medical instruction are required.**

Forward Item 2
on following page, to:

**George Hunt
P.O. Box 905
Carthage, NC 28327**

CEU Reports are due on December 31 of each year.

NACVSO Continuing Education Units (CEU's) Report Form

Complete this form and send it to the NACVSO Education Committee Chairman.

NAME: First	Last	State	Year			
Date of Training →		Hours	Hours	Hours	Hour	Total
*Compensation/Pension-4 Hrs (minimum)						
-Secondary S/C Conditions						
-EVR's Income Evaluation						
-Claim Development						
-Individual Unemployability						
-Presumptive Disabilities						
-Ratings, SMC						
-Other Related Issues; list						
TOTAL HOURS FROM C/P SECTION						
*Appeals-BVA & COVA - 2 Hrs (minimum)						
*Resources/Reference Manuals						
-Title 38 USC-Title 38 CFR- M-21						
-Regional Office Updates						
-Department of Military Affairs -Service Organizations						
-DSM IV						
-Other Related Materials; list						
*USDVA Medical Centers - 1 Hr (minimum)						
*Home Loan Guaranty Program						
*Education						
*Death Benefits						
*Women's Issues						
*Debt Management						
*Insurance						
*Agent Orange/PGW						
*Homeless Veterans						
TOTAL FROM ABOVE SECTIONS - 12 Hrs (minimum)						
*Electives - 4 Hrs (optional)						
-State/Local Veterans Programs						
-Department of Labor						
-Social Security Administration						
-Medical Training, ie Anatomy						
-Anatomy and Physiology						
-Psychology - Sociology						
-Pharmacology Terms						
-ADA						
*Other Related Topics; (list)						
Total From Electives Section						

* Required areas (**indicated in bold**) must be met. To maintain accreditation status with NACVSO, CEU's must total 16 Hrs (minimum) Only 4 Hrs can be in the electives area. 12 Hrs must come from the portion of the form above the double line.

Signature of Applicant:

Date:

Comments:

For Education Committee Use Only:

Total CEU Hours Accepted:

Requirements Met: YES NO

Reviewed by:

Signature of Education Committee Representative

Virtual Veterans

The program, its functions and abilities:

Virtual Veterans (VV) is a comprehensive information management system designed to receive, maintain, and distribute accurate information supporting veteran's cases in a variety of ways and electronically. The program tracks veteran's assistance issues and claims focusing on three main areas: Local, State, and Federal Claims. VV functions as a case management system installed with quality control measures and mandatory information standards. This increases well developed claims, reduces the amount of piece mail submission which reduces the time to process veteran claims and cleanses information for more accurate, reportable data. VV submits and receives information electronically allowing for great reductions in claims processing time frames and more timely benefits to veterans. The following are highlights to VV's abilities:

Data Base: VV is a Microsoft driven program supported by either Access or SQL database. MDVA utilizes SQL in three locations. This allows for adequate space, security, backups, speed, report consideration, submission of State claims electronically to the Central Office and accessibility for remote offices. The St. Paul Regional Office is maintained by the Federal IT Department; Fargo Regional Office is maintained by the Federal IT Department; and Central Office is maintained by OET. MDVA data bases share information; yet will not be accessible to view by other data bases. VV is designed to submit only data selected in claims packets or submittals, not entire data bases. No office utilizing VV will have access to another office's data base. This is accomplished by secure e-mail, setup by MDVA/DRM. No data base will be maintained by DRM as this would cost the company an increase to their insurance premium tenfold.

Intake form: This 65 point intake form allows Office Assistance Staff or the veteran to enter basic information with no interaction of the Claims Representative. This time saver allows Reps to focus more on tasks such as file review, Appeals, hearings, Clear and Unmistakable Error consideration, and delayed decisions. The intake form, once complete, populates the entire data base and all Federal, State and Local forms included in VV. This system improvement allows only one entry data barring a change in the information. Once the veterans name is entered no one utilizing VV need retype or reprocess identical data.

Claims Packets: Once the Claims Intake Form is complete, the Representative has all the information to properly interview the veteran focusing on claims assistance vs. data entry. All forms are ready for submittal and filled with the information provided. The Representative determines the benefits sought and selects a "Claims Packet" to file. The Rep continues developing the claim, or claims, by filling in the case specific information such as disabilities or text on a VA Form 21-4138. Each Claims Packet provides all forms required to complete a well developed claim, suggested forms and a complete submittal letter outlining the benefits sought. Note: All submittal letters have text box for specific details. Claims packets were developed for all State and Federal considerations.

Activities/Assistance Tracking: Although VV allows reporting from any field in the system, its main function is reporting on three main areas: Contacts, Activities, and Assistance. This may or may not be case specific information, yet captures a more realistic measure of the work or assistance being provided by an office. Example, while operating under the previous Veterans Information Management System (VIMS), we were able to track how applications for compensation were processed in a one month period. This case specific information is important yet does not accurately reflect the amount of contacts, activities or effort placed behind one application. With VV we will track the Outreach events, phone calls, office visits, applications, follow up phone calls from the veteran, CVSO calls, as well as all other action taken on behalf of the veteran during the claims. Additionally, all non-case specific information will be documented and reported. Example, regular phone calls, walk-ins, community contacts, e-mails answered and Outreach contacts not specifically named to a veteran in a Representative's case load. DRM was provided with a mandatory list of reports for the MDVA Claims Divisions.

Quality Control Certification of Claims: All Claims packets are laced with mandatory fields such as Name, ethnicity, and gender. This quality control measure provides the reporting of accurate census information and the ability to certify all required data is provided and accurate. As VIMS allowed inaccurate data entry such as misspelling, VV cleanses old data and new entries to maintain accurate data and reporting. Once Representatives certify a Claims Packet, VV verifies all mandatory fields are complete and notifies the user if they are not. A Certified packet is electronically timed and date stamped. Currently the Federal VA has communicated to DRM they are standing by to accept the Quality Control standards, codes and utilities, and Certification procedures being developed in MN.

Current Development: This information is a condensed version of ongoing development of the Virtual Veterans program in the State of Minnesota. We are currently cooperating with Scott County Veterans Services in the preparation of testing secure submission of electronic claims. We plan to test for the first time the week of January 19, 2009. Minnesota leads the effort to receive and distribute information electronically offering our veterans increased quality of service in a timelier manner.

Sub-group #4 – CVSO Enhancement Grants

Unlike the Operational Grant, which counties receive triennially, the Enhancement Grant is an annual, open, competitive grant process where every county as well as the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers is eligible to apply. The first two years of the grant program, the Department had the following programmatic goals under which counties could apply: Outreach; Reintegration; Collaboration with social service agencies, educational institutions, and other relevant community resources; and/or Reduction of homelessness among veterans.

The programmatic goals for the FY09 grant cycle were expanded as a response to feedback Department had not only heard from CVSOs, but had also seen in the previous two year's grant cycles requests. The programmatic goals under which counties could apply: Outreach to veterans; Reintegration of combat veterans; Collaboration with social service agencies, educational institutions, and other relevant community resources; Reduction of homelessness among veterans; Digital Records Management; Transportation Program; Marketing/Advertising; and/or Staff management and training.

Also, before the launch of the FY09 grant cycle, the Department implemented best practices guidelines. The best practices guidelines were established by the same committee that reviews all the grant applications. To meet the "best practices" requirement, each County Veterans Service Office must: Conduct an annual town hall meeting; Submit a fully developed claim for state and federal benefits; Assist subordinates in fully developing claims before submission; Host an annual Veterans Benefits Seminar; Attend and update all Veterans Service Organizations in each county at least once annually; Implement a Management Information System to develop a veteran database to collect and report on key performance information; Provide county specific performance information to their respective county boards twice yearly; Work with MAC-V on programs directed towards the reduction of homeless veterans; and Must work with local businesses on advertising and marketing.

The Department alerted CVSOs to the modification regarding the programmatic goals and best practices before the launch of the grant cycle. The Department conveyed to CVSOs that best practices guidelines are procedures and policies that allow organizations to improve performance of self, colleagues and staff, and business practices.

For each grant cycle CVSOs have been expected to report on Measurable Outcomes. When reviewing grant applications and subsequent reports, the Department noted measureable outcomes were hard for CVSOs to report since many do not have baseline information from which to measure their outcomes. Therefore, for the FY09 grant cycle, the Department, with the assistance of the Office of Grants Management in the Department of Administration, gave a one-sheet guide/explanation of an outcome evaluation system to help CVSOs describe the benefits they provide to the veterans of their county that are a result of their program.

The following are comments from CVSOs regarding the Enhancement Grant Program:

“We thank you on behalf of our veterans for the good that the grant has provided in Freeborn County.”

FY07 Grant Cycle
Jon Rhiger, Freeborn CVSO

“This grant program is easy to use and well managed.”

FY08 Grant Cycle
Harry “Hutch” Hutchens III, Clearwater CVSO

“The Lac Qui Parle County Veterans Service Office, over the past year, has seen veterans and their family members coming out of the so called woodwork to seek assistance with the benefits... this grant fund has made a great difference in the overall success of my program goals and objectives.”

FY08 Grant Cycle
Daniel Meyer, Lac Qui Parle CVSO

“Thank you. This grant gave our hospital shuttle an ‘identity’ within our community.”

FY08 Grant Cycle
Greg Peterson, Brown CVSO

Introduction to Program Outcomes

Grant Programs for Veterans – FY2009

Department of Veterans Affairs

The FY2009 grants request for proposals will require that grant applicants provide measurable outcomes in their grant applications.

An outcome evaluation system will help you describe the benefits to veterans that are a result of your program and it is relatively easy to implement. The main reason to implement an outcome evaluation program is to help you learn what works well in your program and what could be improved. Implementing an outcome evaluation system and using it regularly will help you make your program more effective over time.

To establish an effective outcome evaluation system, you will need to be able to identify the following things about your program.

- **Inputs** – Any resources that are used in your program, like staff and volunteers, equipment, money, etc.
- **Activities** – What you will do with and for the veterans that you work with. Activities are described using words like “teaching, counseling, assisting, managing,” etc.
- **Outputs** – The units of service created by your program. For example, the number of veterans who received help with finding housing. Outputs are often measured by what your program staff or volunteers do for and with the people you serve.
- **Outcomes** – The changes in the lives of veterans that are a result of your program. For example, the number of veterans who actually found housing (as opposed to the number who received help finding housing).
- **Outcome targets** – The numerical goal attached to a particular outcome. For example, “20 veterans will find housing between September 1, 2008 and August 31, 2009”. Another example of an outcome target would be, “80% (16) of the veterans who found housing will maintain in their housing for at least one year.”
- **Outcome indicators** – Outcome indicators help you measure progress toward your outcome targets. Indicators are things that can be seen, heard, or read. They provide “proof” to you that the outcome has been achieved. Questionnaires and surveys can be useful outcome indicators. Data, from a variety of potential sources, is a very common outcome indicator.