

**Board of Veterans Services
Meeting Minutes
July 16, 2007**

A meeting of the Board of Veterans Services (BVS) was held on Monday, July 16, 2007 at the Virginia National Guard Armory in Sandston.

Members Present

John Anderson; Vince Burgess; Paris Davis; Paul Galanti; Pat Green; Thad Jones; Bill Leighty; Samuel Metters; Bettye Simmons; and Max Taylor.

Members Absent

Mason Botts; Mark Cole; Kirk Cox; John Edwards; Jay O'Brien; Al Sample; Judson Stanley; Vivian Watts; and Chairman of the Veterans Services Foundation Board of Trustees.

Commonwealth of Virginia Officials Present

Anne Atkins, Communications Director, Department of Veterans Services; Bert Boyd, Chief Operating Officer, Department of Veterans Services; Greg Brittingham, Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Public Policy; Vickie Broughman, Human Resource Manager, Department of Veterans Services; Steve Combs, Director of Policy and Planning, Department of Veterans Services; Rhonda Earman, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services; Don Ferguson, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General; Danny Glen, Virginia Commonwealth University work study program; Jim Granger, Acting Benefits Services Manager, Department of Veterans Services; David Harker, Outreach Director, Department of Veterans Services; Dan Kemano, Cemeteries Director, Department of Veterans Services; Sandra Ranicki, Administrator, SitterBarfoot Veterans Care Center; Armistead Ransone, Finance and Administration Director, Department of Veterans Services; Eutopia Rogers, Administrative Office Specialist, Department of Veterans Services; David Simmons, Information Technology Manager, Department of Veterans Services; and Bill Van Thiel, Administrator, Virginia Veterans Care Center, Department of Veterans Services.

Others Present

George Abbitt; Tom Anderson; Tom Briggs; Joe Carr; Zane Clark; Cary Ford; Charles Floyd; James Hancock; Danny Jackson; Roger Overstreet; Carl Satterfield; and other members of the Virginia Veterans Coalition who did not sign in.

Materials Distributed

Meeting process outline; draft minutes of the March 19, 2007 meeting; Summary of DVS Town Hall meetings; Executive Order 19 Summary of Initiatives; DVS Strategic Plan summary; and 2007 Strategic Planning Process summary.

Call to Order

With 8 of 19 members present, Chairman Galanti called the meeting to order at approximately 9:30 a.m. Paris Davis and Bill Leighty arrived after the meeting began, and John Anderson left before the meeting was adjourned. The membership and guests recited the pledge of allegiance to the American flag.

Approval of Minutes

Due to a lack of quorum, approval of the minutes was deferred to the September meeting.

Opening Remarks

Chairman Galanti began his remarks by praising the General Assembly and the Governor's Office for working together over the past three years to get veterans legislation and funding measures passed. Mr. Galanti noted that this bi-partisan effort has gone a long way in improving programs and services for Virginia veterans.

Mr. Galanti said that DVS recently had conducted town hall meetings across the state, where input on veterans issues was received. Anne Atkins summarized the public input received at the forums, and a copy of the summary was distributed.

Mr. Galanti noted that he and Commissioner Burgess also had met recently with a representative of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Division of Compensation and Benefits for a presentation on DVS programs and initiatives, including the new TurboVet project.

Commissioner Burgess announced that Anne Atkins, who has been serving as an on-loan executive from the Department of Motor Vehicles, has been hired as the DVS Communications Director. Commissioner Burgess also reported the sudden passing of DVS Finance and Administration Consultant Robert Shackelford, Jr.

Commissioner Burgess said that DVS recently completed its Executive Order 19 (Serving Virginia Veterans) report, and a summary of the report's initiatives was distributed.

DPB Requirements

Steve Combs distributed copies of a summary of the DVS Strategic Plan (the Plan), as well as a summary of the 2007 strategic planning process. Mr. Combs explained the goals and objectives of each of the Plan's components and said that the goals and objectives are linked at the state, agency and service area levels. He noted that Goal #5 is common to all state agencies. Mr. Combs said that the Council on Virginia's Future develops the state's high-level goals, and that agencies develop goals that support the state goals. In turn, the service areas develop objectives that support agency goals. He said that the Department of Planning and Budget (DPB) maintains a database of all state agencies' plan data. Mr. Combs noted that DVS data is posted to the DVS web site and the DPB web site.

John Anderson emphasized the importance of measuring results associated with each goal and objective. Mr. Combs explained that while progress towards the agency goals currently is not measured, each of the objectives in DVS's five service area plans is measured. As an example, he explained that one of the objectives in the Cemetery Service Area Plan was a 10% annual increase in the number of memorial services at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery. He gave two other examples: one of the objectives in the Benefits Service Area Plan is to achieve a 71.5% claims approval rate, while one of the objectives of the Care Centers Service Area Plan is to achieve a 95% occupancy rate in the nursing care section at the Virginia Veterans Care Center.

Greg Brittingham then began the facilitated portion of the meeting by stating the areas the group would explore included critical factors, opportunities, strategies and next steps.

Critical Factors

Mr. Brittingham explained that the group would explore the factors that work for, and factors that work against, DVS as it seeks to better serve Virginia veterans over the next five years.

The group identified some of the primary factors that could work against DVS:

1. Technology illiteracy – some veterans do not have the knowledge, skill or equipment to access digital information.
2. Remote/rural locations – some veterans live in areas of the state that do not have access to published information.
3. Lack of awareness/confusion over DVS programs and services – some veterans do not know DVS is available to assist them and often confuse DVS with the VA.
4. Fragmented information – often information received by veterans about benefits and other veterans issues is fragmented or conflicting.
5. Demographics considerations – e.g., older veterans have different needs than younger veterans; and disabled veterans have different needs than those who are not disabled.
6. Lack of continuity/coordination of federal, state and local benefits.
7. Insufficient federal and state funding for many years, and competing interests from other agencies.
8. Length of time it takes to process and benefits claims and receive decisions.
9. Geographic distribution of resources across state, including variables such as concentrations of veteran population.
10. Failure of veterans to join and participate in Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs).
11. Changes in military force, such as National Guard and Reserve units being deployed to overseas combat.

The group then identified some of the factors working in favor of DVS.

1. Dedicated, qualified agency staff; and 2003 consolidation and establishment of Commissioner's Office.
2. Excellent collaborative relationship between the legislature and Governor's office.
3. Excellent collaborative relationship with Veterans Service Organizations through the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC).
4. Diverse/non-partisan representation on the Board, including legislators and citizens.

5. High population of veterans in Virginia, as well as military leadership/command centers located in Virginia and adjacent Washington, DC.
6. Other state agencies want to collaborate with DVS to ensure veterans' success.
7. DVS is working to address previously identified areas needing improvement, such as hiring a training coordinator to better train Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs); and outreach to recently discharged veterans.

Vision, Opportunities and Critical Actions

Group members then were asked to provide their vision for DVS by the year 2012 and ways to achieve the goals:

1. Expand/improve organizational capacity and efficiency (ongoing learning process).
2. Improve coordination/interoperability with federal and state agencies.
3. Work with federal partners to be proactive, versus reactive, to federal decisions.
4. Work to keep discharged veterans and military retirees in Virginia by maximizing veterans' educational benefits and workforce development initiatives, recognizing that veterans represent a good pool of qualified applicants for Virginia's workforce and also provide revenue streams. (Focus on in-state tuition measures, so veterans won't relocate to other states with better education benefits; and identify/address issues relating to transfer of credits from institution to institution.)
5. Identify/prioritize benefits needs and meet them:
 - A. Full funding for veterans cemetery services and sufficient number of cemeteries across the state;
 - B. Improve claims processing and service delivery by better training (including technological support systems) and compensating VSRs; and actively recruiting veterans/retired military for VSR positions;
 - C. Recognize the special needs of veterans that are more vulnerable, such as disabled veterans, and help level the playing field by ensuring equal access.
 - D. Provide for sufficient number of care centers across the state.
6. Ensure adequate resources to meet veterans health care needs.
 - A. Work to address emerging medical and behavioral health care needs for all veterans, including outpatient services, and act as conduit to VA health system.
 - B. Prioritize and provide for convenient access to services to all veterans across the state.

Board of Veterans Services Meeting Minutes
July 16, 2007

7. Build on current Board focus by refining strategic goals/roles and develop specific skill sets to act strategically.
8. Promote mandatory benefits briefing for all veterans processing out of the military, providing print, audio and video media resources.
9. Increase awareness of DVS in the veteran community through marketing initiatives.
10. Promote and market membership in VSOs.
11. Expand/improve user-friendly communications capabilities.
 - A. Establish toll-free veterans help line in all yellow page phone books.
 - B. Provide print brochures on DVS programs and services to all VSOs in Virginia.
 - C. Develop print brochures with information on all VSOs in Virginia.
 - D. Develop veterans database for outreach purposes.
 - E. Continue with town hall meeting concept for input from the veteran community.
 - F. Include veterans' family members in communications, especially for those who may have severely limiting disabilities.
 - G. Send direct print and electronic mailings to discharging veterans.
12. Establish veterans liaison and designate board member as link.
13. Strengthen and better coordinate private/public partnerships, including those with federal state and local elected officials.
14. Increase access to education opportunities.
15. Utilize Board's subcommittees to facilitate objectives.
16. Work to remove barriers such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations to allow access to veterans medical records for the purpose of identifying those in need of services.
17. Ensure budget resources are consistent with service delivery.
18. Conduct DVS function/structure review.
19. Expand JLC membership to include regional representatives.

Board of Veterans Services Meeting Minutes
July 16, 2007

20. Establish a work group to address disabled veterans' issues.
21. Identify other state agency services that could benefit veterans.
22. Establish a workgroup to study recommendations on best practices from other state veterans agencies.
23. Coordinate objectives with EO 19 initiatives.

Next Steps

Chairman Galanti tasked the Budget and Strategic Planning Ad Hoc Subcommittee with developing a plan to implement the group's objectives, with timelines for achieving them, and report back to the full Board. Mr. Brittingham promised to prepare a summary of the group's ideas and recommendations, which will be posted to the DVS web site, and used as a working document for the Subcommittee.

Reschedule September 17 Meeting

The September 17 meeting was rescheduled to September 10 at 11:30 at the Clubs at Quantico, subject to the availability of the meeting site, followed by a tour of the Marine Corps Museum.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:45 p.m.