

Virginia Department of Veterans Services

July 16, 2007 Board Retreat Summary Report

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The Board of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services met on July 16, 2007 at the National Guard Armory in Sandston, Virginia to conduct a Board retreat.

Board members identified a list of opportunities for DVS to focus its efforts on during the next five years (Table A provides additional detailed information). Factors working for and against achievement of the opportunities were identified. Strategies for achieving the identified opportunities were established to guide DVS staff in developing operational plans (Table B provides additional detailed information).

Opportunities for Achievement during the Next Five Years

- Veterans will have ready access to high priority services provided by DVS
- The DVS Board will be strategically focused with clear roles and responsibilities
- Federal educational benefits will be fully utilized to strengthen Virginia's workforce
- Resources will be available to identify and meet the health care needs of veterans
- Federal, state and local partnerships will be coordinated with strong interoperability
- DVS will be a learning organizations with increased organizational capability and proficiency
- Proactive partnerships will be in place with federal authorities and agencies
- State benefit needs will be identified and services in place to meet those needs

Factors Working Against DVS

- Lack of hard data, such as the number of Veteran's using education benefits, etc., makes it difficult to document needs
- Making assumptions about communicating with veterans, for example, not all veterans have computers, home delivery of newspapers, etc.
- DVS staff availability is M-F 8-5pm – How do we reach working Veteran's? What are demographic needs?
- Technology literacy – How many Veterans' use online services to gain information and conduct business?
- Location of convenient offices for veterans, especially in rural areas
- Many veterans do not know about DVS services – Not enough advertising
- Fragmented information concerning veterans provided by many sources
- Not tapping into Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs)
- Younger veteran's not joining VSOs due to different needs and perceptions – young veterans are not getting the information they need
- Fragmented services, especially for newly returning veterans and veterans needing medical care
- Time needed to cut though Federal red tape

- DVS/VA distinction is unclear to many veterans and their families
- Veterans do not know about the efforts of the Joint Leadership Council (JLC)
- Not enough integration of federal, state and local efforts – no continuity
- State and federal funding shortfalls limits services, benefits
- DVS has no control over federal VA systems
- Long training period for DVS benefit representatives – many staff with 2 years or less experience – very dependent on on-the-job training
- Many veterans in rural areas – how to reach?
- Many issues at Federal level – how to influence?
- Still playing catch-up, state late in organizing to meet veteran needs
- Not many state benefits such as tax exemptions
- Competing priorities
 - Young, older veterans
 - Setting priorities
- Geographic distribution of DVS resources – information dissemination – what are variables to consider?
- Adapt to force changes National Guard, Reserves more important now

Factors Working for DVS

- Good current staff
- Strong, positive collaboration with Governor's office (at federal level too)
- JLC with DVS – Good partnerships
- Buddy system in place with other agencies – assistance from those outside DVS
- Interstate benchmarking provides information and perspective
- JLC meeting feedback – need to get to VSOs
- DVS Board – diverse, experienced, knowledgeable
- Veteran care is a hot button issue – may get more funding
- National focus on Veteran issues – one force view
- DVS Commissioner with a focus on veterans issues – long term focus vs. agency survival
- Have direct access to the Governor's office – now part of public safety
- Reorganization of DVS – New structure
- Virginia location of choice for many veterans – large number with strong voice
- Home to controlling offices of the Military – high significance
- State agencies willing to assist veterans, work with DVS
- 93% of fortune 500 CEO's are veterans – know veterans needs
- Agency already addressing some issues such as training, outreach to young veteran's

DVS Strategies for Achievement

- Identify and prioritize veteran needs and allocate necessary resources
- Expand user-friendly communication capability
- Strengthen public/private partnerships and coordination
- Increase access to education
- Maintain quality staff
- Attract military retirees

Table A: DVS Opportunities for Achievement during the Next Five Years

Veterans have Access to High Priority DVS Services	The DVS Board is Strategically Focused with Clear Roles and Responsibilities	Educational Benefits are Maximized to Strengthen Virginia’s Workforce	Resources are Available to Identify and Meet the Health Care Needs of Veterans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Traveling service reps will meet with pre-discharge veterans ▪ Accessible state headquarters (SBCC?) ▪ Development of a pre-veteran program for all military facilities in the Commonwealth ▪ Increase in VSO participations that better reflects the veteran population ▪ 100% inclusiveness of vets in rural Virginia ▪ National leaders in addressing needs of female vets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DVS Board ownership – can “show and tell” ▪ Assign Board members areas of responsibility (AOR) to ensure connectivity ▪ Defined outcomes required for all DVS goals in the strategic plan ▪ New subcommittee formed to address the needs of younger veterans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ARTs transcripts accepted at all Virginia schools ▪ State loans for school and housing to better or trump VA benefits ▪ In-state tuition for all veterans ▪ Virginia has the highest rate of maximizing use of the GI Bill ▪ Veteran business development center ▪ A plan to better utilize the capabilities of veterans to provide services to the Commonwealth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2nd veterans care center in place and third under construction ▪ Care center services available in Tidewater, Northern Virginia, Southside and Southwest Virginia ▪ Integrated behavioral health care services for every veteran and family in need ▪ All veterans accepted at VA hospitals and sub-hospitals are in place in outlying areas ▪ State level pilot programs for clinical outpatient services for veterans in collaboration with the VA or other federal health care initiatives ▪ Increase in travel reimbursement for vets traveling to receive medical services
Federal, State and Local Partnerships are Coordinated with Strong Interoperability	DVS is a Learning Organization with Increased Organizational Capability and Proficiency	Proactive Partnership with Federal Authorities and Agencies	State Benefit Needs are Identified and Services are in Place to meet those Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building upon excellence – great starting point ▪ Local, state and federal government cooperation ▪ Absolute linkage to all state agencies ▪ A coordinated delivery of services for veterans in Virginia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased percentage of successful claims ▪ 90% approval rates for all claims ▪ Full implementation of Turbo Vet ▪ VA disabilities approval at high rate due to DVS services ▪ Organizational capability to quickly respond to Federal VA benefit initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal reach out to Senate and House for all working DVS initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State tax advantages for military retirees ▪ Completion of 3rd veterans cemetery in Dublin ▪ Funding for all veteran care centers and cemeteries at 100% to include burial vaults

Table B: DVS Strategies for Achievement

Identify and Prioritize Veteran Needs and Allocate Necessary Resources	Expand User-Friendly Communication Capability	Strengthen Public/Private Partnerships and Coordination	Increase Access to Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct DVS function/structure review ▪ Identify state agency services that are appropriate for integration with DVS ▪ Task group to study and make recommendations on best practices in other states ▪ Expand JLC membership to include regional representatives ▪ Identify data needs to plan for veteran needs and develop methodology to track data and identify trends ▪ Workgroup to address issues of disabled veterans and employment/retraining options ▪ Rank order needs ▪ Prioritize services ▪ Ensure budget is consistent with delivery of services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central toll free phone line (DVS) for veterans information posted in all Yellow Pages ▪ Provide technology support to VSOs ▪ Implement “No Wrong Door” via internet portal within state government ▪ Organization information to all Veterans: address and phone number at discharge provided to VFW, American Legion, MOAA ▪ Improve veteran communication by: better access to web, toll free number, Town Hall meetings, customer surveys ▪ Location posted to all veterans on location of Veteran CTs ▪ Have direct mail/email program to all Virginia veterans ▪ Business help phone line to all veterans in Virginia ▪ Develop Veterans database for outreach ▪ Make information available to immediate family ▪ Have VA send packets to veterans children who attend school ▪ Make videos or CD’s for veterans as they leave service ▪ Change HIPPA to allow access to records for those who need it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Veteran liaison established ▪ Ongoing sessions between federal and state agencies ▪ Continue to build upon a successful operation ▪ Encourage full legislative committees (in lieu of subcommittee) ▪ Designate DVS member as federal link ▪ Develop partnerships with local government elected officials for rural outreach ▪ Improve pay and training of VSOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pass law stating any veteran gets in-state tuition ▪ Identify why VA schools don’t accept ART transcripts

Maintain Quality Staff	Attract Military Retirees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Active recruiting from retiring military for claims persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Turn Fort Monroe into a military retirement community