

Virginia Board of Veteran Services

Point of Contact Report

Virginia Women Veterans Program Update

1. Date of Report:
 - August 20, 2020
2. Virginia BVS POC(s):
 - Delegate Kathleen Murphy and Lyla Kohistany
3. Service Area/Program:
 - VETE / Virginia Women Veterans Program (VWVP)
4. VDVS Leadership/Program Manager:
 - Deputy Commissioner Annie Walker and Beverly VanTull
5. Mission of service area/program (i.e. what does it do?):
 - A collaborative program providing access to community resources to educate, unify, and empower Virginia's women veterans. Our goal is to ensure women veterans receive timely and appropriate transition and benefits referral support, employment and education outreach, health, and community advocacy, and to identify any other needs not yet identified. We intend to expand awareness and advocacy on behalf of Virginia's women veterans to enhance their lives while increasing community visibility and partnership opportunities. We coordinate/monitor access to a wide array of local, state, and federal veteran benefits tailored to meet women's needs, develop objectives to support strategic focus on women veterans, and maintain a continued focus through the annual Virginia Women Veterans Summit.
6. Who does the service area/program serve (i.e. who are the customers)?
 - Women Veterans residing within the Commonwealth of Virginia are the benefactors of this program.
7. How is the service/program delivered?
 - The program is delivered primarily through face-to-face meetings, targeted community outreach activities, and networking. Under the current special conditions of COVID-19, service provision is focusing on providing referrals and support telephonically, via email, and via virtual meeting platforms. Our annual statewide summit educates women

veterans on resources, community partners, employers, and services available to them. The 2020 event was held virtually, and 1,351 attendees registered with over 1,900 views of the conference.

8. How does delivering the service/program help Virginia's veterans?

- Women veterans suffer a higher rate of homelessness, suicide, substance abuse and divorce compared to male veterans. By providing this program committed specifically to serving women veterans and their unique needs, we can minimize the emotional and social impact to the individuals and the communities they live in. We can attract and reach more diverse communities of underserved veterans and families with state services. This includes support for transition, employment, readjustment, continuing education, or vocational training. We can serve as a major support conduit to resources that assist them in overcoming barriers to professional growth all the way to personal/emotional trauma counseling. Through the annual statewide Virginia Women Veterans Summit, we provide a visibly focused outlet and opportunity to empower and inform women veterans regarding benefits, state resources, networking, and programs to which they may be entitled. This program is another tool to help ensure Virginia is doing all that can be done to support all our brave veterans in an equitable manner. This program provides a voice of advocacy and support to an otherwise "hidden and unheard" community of Virginia veterans in need.

9. By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth?

- By providing focused support to educate our women veterans of the services, resources, and benefits to which they are entitled, we will increase a sense of belonging, as well as utilization of services. As we empower our women veterans to achieve their full potential and enhance their health and wellness, they can build stability in their lives and Virginia communities. This support has positive effects that ranges from enhancing the Virginia economy with new women veterans owned businesses with employment opportunities to community engaged advocates leading the way in legislative policy. By enlightening Virginia communities about the issues and challenges that women veterans face, we will not only increase awareness, but enhance perspectives on how to improve local diversity and collaboration. Virginia will see results in a stronger workforce within connected communities leading to a more resilient Virginia. This will continue to bring a spotlight on Virginia as the most veteran-friendly state in the nation.

10. What is the statutory authority for the service area/program?

- § 2.2-2004 (17). Additional powers and duties of Commissioner
"Establish and implement a compact with Virginia's veterans, which shall have a goal of making Virginia America's most veteran-friendly state. The compact shall be established in conjunction with the Board of Veterans Services and supported by the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations and shall (i) include specific provisions for technology advances, workforce development, outreach, quality of life enhancement, and other services for veterans and (ii) provide service standards and goals to be attained for each specific provision in clause (i)."

And VDVS Goals to support “Compact with Virginia’s Veterans”

VDVS Goal #1: Augment the new Virginia economy with mission-ready, relevantly-skilled veterans by creating seamless transitions for veterans with high quality education and workforce services that accelerate career opportunities. (Workforce Development)

DVS Objective #5 in support of Goal #1: Women Veterans Program Manager to build strategic focus on women veterans, and a continued focus on the annual Virginia Women Veterans Summit (Outreach focus)

VDVS Goal #2: Improve outcomes for veterans and their families in the areas of behavioral health, rehabilitative services, supportive services, health and financial stability. (Quality of Life Enhancement)

11. Where do the resources for the service area/program come from (general fund, non-general fund, donations, etc.?)

- General Funds from Education, Transition and Employment (VETE) Directorate provides necessary support to cover personnel, supplies, and additional resources. Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Employer partnerships and donations made to the Virginia Veteran Services Foundation are used as additional funding sources. These partners are used to support our annual statewide women veterans summit.

12. How has COVID-19 impacted the delivery of services? What service adaptations have been made or are planned?

- All outreach activities have had to move to a virtual format. We have seen that the program referral services are still able to be provided with the technology available. Virtual platforms like Zoom, Google Meet and Free Conference Call have been instrumental in keeping the program connected to women veterans and community partners. We have been able to start considering the benefits of a hybrid approach for the future to balance between using technology (such as virtual platforms and social media) while leveraging community resources, V3 partnerships, and in-person outreach to maintain contact with our women veteran communities. We have also noted that a number of women veteran centric community programs managed by local non-profit and faith-based organizations has experienced a lack of funding and an overflow of referral requests. As such, women veterans are experiencing longer wait times for services or support. We have adjusted to these changes by directing women veterans mainly to VDVS internal support or VA services.

13. What are the biggest challenges facing the service area/program at present?

- Staffing is a challenge. Currently managing program development, women veteran inquiry support, community resources/ partnership engagement, outreach activities,

identifying resources (new/ local) and administrative duties is a challenge to be handled mainly by one person.

14. What strategic opportunities are there for the future?

- Within FY 2019, Virginia’s women veteran population increased to 107,533 citizen veterans according to VA Center for Women Veterans. We were was able to reach over 1,700 women veterans during events such as Statewide Annual summit, women veterans week and other FY19 outreach activities. So far, in FY20, within a virtual environment we have reached almost another 1,600 women veterans. The one thing that “keeps me up at night” is how we can impact more women veterans with information, benefits, and support. The key objective of this program is to help women veterans find their “pathways to success” as they rebuild their lives in the civilian community after years of military service. We believe developing agency/community collaboration projects could help attract more women veterans to self-identify and utilize services, such as:
- Building Employment / Education/ Peer Coaching / Mentorship projects with federal partners and national groups like:
 - Women’s Bureau under the Department of Labor
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb>
Ex. Women Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations (WANTO) Grant
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/grants/wanto>
 - Virginia Community Colleges System (VCCS) comprised of 23 community colleges located on 40 campuses
<https://www.vccs.edu/serving-veterans/>
Ex. VCU Project Achieve -Women Veterans w/ Traumatic Brain Injury focus
<https://centerontransition.org/>
 - Women Veteran Network (WoVeN)
<https://www.wovenwomenvets.org/>
 - Military Sisterhood Initiative
<https://www.militarysisterhoodinitiative.org/>
- Community Impact Volunteerism has a distinct ability to present a multi-tiered “benefit to the Commonwealth” effect. It will encourage more women veterans to self-identify as they reconnect to a “new mission” to serve Virginia communities. It will encourage a positive public perspective about veterans, as well as share the “good news stories” due to women veteran volunteers. This will enrich the next generation of Virginians by increasing community awareness and visibility through collaboration with groups like:
 - Big Brothers and Big Sister of America
<https://www.bbbs.org/>

- Girl Scouts of USA
<https://www.girlscouts.org/>
- YWCA USA (Empowering Women / Eliminating Racism)
<https://www.ywca.org/>
- Develop more opportunities to support Women Veteran Entrepreneurs
 - Building a Virginia Women Veteran Business Directory with the support of V3 partners like PENFED or Federal partners like SBA or national partners like Bunker Labs and VWISE.
“Women represent 10 percent of the veteran population in the U.S. but own one in six veteran-owned businesses. Their businesses generate over \$17 billion a year, and the growth of women veterans’ startups has been “higher than any other segment of the entrepreneurship economy,” according to Carla Harris, chair of the National Women's Business Council. However, women entrepreneurs receive a staggeringly low 2 percent of all capital investment and only 4.4 percent of total dollars in small business loans. Many women veterans are starting their own businesses with just their personal savings.”
 - Excerpt from <https://www.foxbusiness.com/money/women-veteran-startups-entrepreneurship-seda-goff>

15. What else do you want the Board to know about this service area?

- The VWVP program is working towards identifying (and vetting) unique opportunities to form partnerships with a diverse array of Virginia based resources/ partners who offer services designed specifically for women veteran needs. We are also targeting opportunities to connect with national associations and federal partners who could expand support services within or into Virginia.
- Virginia is one of only 34 states nationally that have a state women veterans representatives. At the end of FY19, Virginia was one of 25 states with a fulltime program manager/ coordinator. No new states have added a part-time or fulltime program manager/coordinator since Virginia’s announcement.