

## **BVS POC Report**

### **Cemeteries Services**

1. Date of Report: July 5, 2022
2. BVS POC(s): Melissa Watts
3. Service Area/Program: Cemeteries Services
4. VDVS Director/Program Manager: Michael H. Henshaw
5. Mission of service area/program (i.e. what does it do?): The Cemeteries Service Line provides dignified burials in national shrines for veterans and their eligible family members in perpetuity.
6. Who does the service area/program serve (i.e. who are the customers)? Any veteran with an other-than-dishonorable discharge who completed 24 months of active duty service in a regular component of the US Armed Forces, Reserve and Guard retirees and those ordered to active duty under a presidential order and their eligible family members, ROTC and service academy cadets who die while undergoing training, and certain other individuals such as Hmong veterans, Philippine Army veterans from WW2 who assisted the US Army, Merchant Marines with WW2 service, NOAA commissioned officers, etc.  
  
Guard, Reserve and current ROTC members can be interred for certain fees as of 25 April 2022 under the new Special Category Interment Program (SCIP). Current fees are \$1,700 for cremations and \$2,000 for caskets. SCIP dependents also eligible for same fees.
7. How is the service/program delivered? VDVS operates three state Veterans cemeteries. The Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk; the Virginia State Veterans Cemetery in Amelia, and; the Southwest Virginia State Veterans Cemetery in Dublin.
8. How does delivering the service/program help Virginia's veterans? We provide a grave space, opening and closing of the grave, a government-furnished headstone or marker, an outer burial receptacle, a place to conduct a committal service and perpetual care at no cost to the veteran and a fee of \$400 for spouses and other eligible dependents.
9. By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth? Choosing interment in a Virginia State Veterans Cemetery saves an average of \$8-10K than being interred in a private cemetery.
10. What is the statutory authority for the service area/program?

**State:** Code of Virginia, Title 2.2. Administration of Government, Chapter 20

**Federal:** 38USC, Sections 501a, 2408 and 2303.

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

Virginia State Veterans Cemeteries receive \$1.5M in annual appropriated state funds and appx. \$2.1M from plot allowance reimbursements (currently \$828) and the \$400 spousal/dependent burial fees (\$3.6M annual budget).

12. How has COVID-19 impacted the delivery of services? What service adaptations have been made or are planned? COVID reduced the amount of attendees allowed at the committal services, required appointments for in-person services and resulted in staff shortages. Since January 2022, all cemeteries are operating normally with no issues or restrictions.

13. What are the biggest challenges facing the service area/program at present? Our interment rates increased by 24% in FY21 over FY20 and is 6% higher at this point in FY22. We increased FTE by six employees and purchased additional equipment, but our level of appropriated funding has remained the same since FY21 and there is no increase for FY23/24 budget cycles. We began interments of formerly ineligible Guardsmen, Reservists and their dependents on 25 April 2022 due to the passage of the Burial Equity for Guards and Reserves Act which authorizes us to inter these individuals without losing federal grant funding. We have interred two former Reservists and have approved three pre-applications.

14. What strategic opportunities are there for the future?

We desperately need an in-house honor squad in Suffolk. Currently, appx. 10% of the veterans interred receive the rifle salute (21-gun salute) due to the lack of VSO support in the local area and the high number of interments. A dedicated 501 (c) (3) organization (non-VSO) has been applied for and awaiting IRS approval. This non-profit will manage donations, fundraising, etc. The primary needs are a van for transportation for volunteers, a pre-fab building for equipment and uniforms. There is tremendous interest in volunteering, however, the equipment and funding is lacking.

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

We are awaiting the results of an ongoing salaries study to ensure our salaries are comparable to the same work as positions in the National Cemetery Administration.