

Board Minutes
04November2015
Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum
7711 E. Academy Blvd., Denver, CO 80230

Dana Niemela, Chair, called the meeting to order at 0836 hours. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was observed for our POW, MIA, troops in battle or in harm's way, and all service members.

Roll Call of Members and Introduction of Staff and Guests

Board Members Present:

Dana Niemela, Chair
Duane Dailey, Vice-Chair
Rene Simard, Secretary
Hollie Caldwell, Member
William "Robby" Robinson, Member
Jack Rudder, Member

Board Members Absent:

Christopher Holden, Member

DMVA Staff Present:

Mickey Hunt, DMVA Deputy Director
Ben Mestas, CDVA Director
Greg Dorman, DMVA Legislative Liaison
Gail Hoagland, DMVA Grant Administrator
Carissa Snyder, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Guests Present:

Lewis Entz, UVC
Tony Gerardini, Colorado Department of Human Services
James Gillespie, Comitis Crisis Center
Bill Holen, Arapahoe County Commissioner
Marvin Myers, UVC
Richard Sandrock, Manager of Community Partnerships, Office of the Governor
Theresa Rudder, Jack's wife

Approval of Minutes from October

Mr. Robinson inquired where and to whom corrections to the minutes should be sent. Consensus was that any corrections should be sent to the CDVA administrative assistant with a copy sent to Ms. Niemela; it is not necessary to copy all the Board members. The minutes were then approved as written.

Board Member Comments

Ms. Caldwell reported that she has distributed Stand Down information at her campus and so far has 20 veterans signed up to attend. She said that she enjoyed visiting two State Veterans Community Living Centers on the recent tour, and in Rifle met former POWs as well as female veterans, including a nurse. She was impressed by the feeling of community at the facilities. She commented that she had served at the Lowry Air Force Base, the current site of the Wings Over the Rockies Museum.

Mr. Dailey entered his new email address into the record: gvcvso@grand.co.us. He apologized for his uncharacteristically sporadic attendance, explaining that there has been a great deal of veteran activity in Grand County this fall.

Mr. Rudder commented that he too was stationed at the Lowry Air Force Base, in 1966-1967.

Ms. Niemela reported that she had visited the State veterans Community Living Centers in Florence, Homelake, and Walsenburg. She commented on the positive community feeling that she encountered and how she enjoyed the opportunity to converse with the residents and the staff. She expressed her appreciation of the time taken by fellow members of the Board to interact with CLC residents at the Board meeting in Florence. She then informed the Board that on 09 November she and Mr. Simard will be sitting on a panel hosted by the Strum Family Foundation and the University of Denver's School of Psychology. The university is considering the implementation of a Military Psychology program that will focus on an interdisciplinary approach. The panel is open to the public.

Visitor Comments

Mr. Holen reported that the Veterans Service Office in Arapahoe County has added staff. There are now two full-time service officers and a part-time administrative assistant. They have established a partnership between the VSO and the Works department to offer training and employment assistance to veterans. Mr. Robinson inquired whether the additional funds provided by the state to county veterans' services influenced their staffing changes. Mr. Holen replied that it did not. He mentioned that he serves on the NAVSCO Board and is always working to liaise between Boards and organizations. He stated a current issue is the need for states to provide more long-term funding for county veterans services. On 03 Nov Mr. Holen was interviewed by the Denver Post, partly in regard to the Choice card. He recounted his own experience in which it took him approximately seven months to schedule an appointment through the Choice program. He reported that statistics indicate that only 1.9% of eligible veterans have utilized the program. Ms. Niemela thanks him for his comments. Mr. Dailey added that Arapahoe County Board of County Commissioners has long been a standard for other Colorado counties.

Mr. Meyers commented that the SVCLC at Fitzsimons currently occupies five acres of a 15-acre site, and plans are in development to add a domiciliary section and one for transitional living. Legislation is currently being drafted to create the appropriation of funds. Mr. Robinson expressed his support and encouraged the other Board members to espouse the new legislation if the Adjutant General and Governor decide to support it.

Mr. Sandrock commented that the VOA has been proactive on homeless outreach, trying to spread the word about the new veteran's center in Denver. He reported that the Lieutenant Governor attended an aerospace and STEM day for students in northeastern Colorado and that on 10 November the Governor will give his Veterans Day remarks at an event near the Capitol.

Guest Presentation

Mr. Gillespie addressed the Board on behalf of Comitis Crisis Center. He began with a description of the organization, which provides emergency, long-term, and transitional housing for individuals and families. They have a program specific to veterans in which they can house a veteran and the veteran's family with all expenses paid for two years while they help the veteran and family obtain stable housing and employment. The VA pays a per diem stipend for the veteran only, so the support of veterans' families is borne by the organization. They are pursuing legislation that would allow the VA to also pay a per diem for dependent children. The current wait list for the veterans' program is 23 families. Ms. Hoagland recalled that the center received a Veteran Assistance Grant last fiscal year and inquired why they had not submitted an application for the current cycle. Mr. Gillespie explained that the center is receiving funding from the DAV trust. Ms. Niemela and Mr. Holen also recommended that that veterans in need of urgent assistance be referred to other community resources, such as Denver Human Services and the Arapahoe Douglas Mental Health Network. Mr. Simard mentioned that the Aurora Defense Council has made Homeless Veteran's support a special interest item for the year. Mr. Gillespie attends and presents to the council at their monthly meetings. The goal is to build awareness and support within the community for funding assistance and to reinforce the need for legislation with the congressional staffers that attend the meetings.

Board Member Reports

Ms. Niemela reminded the Board that reports were submitted in writing prior to the meeting for the Board members to review. A copy of the reports will be attached to the minutes. She then invited report addenda.

Mr. Mestas reported that America Serves is working with MyVA Communities in the Colorado Springs area. America Serves coordinates networks of veterans services and already has an active presence in New York City, Philadelphia, and Charlotte. There will be a community meeting held in Colorado Springs on or about 18 January. Ms. Niemela stated that she plans to attend the January meeting with AmericaServes, as well as a town hall meeting on this topic.

Ms. Hoagland reminded the Board that the items in her report would be addressed later on the agenda. She also mentioned that VTF grantee VFW Post 1 received coverage in the 17 Oct edition of the New York Times. She encouraged the Board to consider the Post for a guest speaker or a site visit. It was noted by Mr. Robinson and approved by several Board members that the Board would have to proceed with caution in the selection of guest speakers between December and March, to not inadvertently offer an advantage to any organization that is also a grant applicant.

Annual Report

Ms. Niemela stated that all items for the annual report have been submitted except for the information from the cemetery. The Board's bylaws require that the report be complete by 31 December. She also called for discussion on an item in both statute and the bylaws that requires that the Board report on all veterans organizations; taken literally, it may not be practicable. Mr. Dorman opined that the statute was not meant to preclude the Board from acting it what it feels to be in the best interest of Colorado veterans. He also stated that forthcoming legislation may abolish such reports. Mr. Robinson added that historically, the Board has reported on state programs only.

Veterans Trust Fund Grant Review

Ms. Niemela stated that Ms. Hoagland has distributed a draft of the 2016-2017 RFP, and Ms. Hoagland added that she had received feedback from almost all of Board members. Ms. Niemela reminded the Board that modifications to the process are designed to make the decision process accountable and transparent.

Ms. Hoagland reported that the grant program is receiving increased attention across the state. The next cycle has received more than 35 inquiries to date from organizations that are not previous recipients of the VTF grant. This indicates that the number of applications will increase and requests will be very competitive. It will be of particular importance to have articulated reasons why applications are or are not funded.

Ms. Hoagland distributed a copy of the recommendations from the state auditors, much of which focused on the application process. Ms. Caldwell expressed concern that a noticeable number of past grantees did not comply with the reporting requirements, and Mr. Simard concurred. Ms. Hoagland agreed that some current grantees continue to struggle with this and stated that she will be holding a series of region-based webinars to coach and advise grantees of the requirements and how to meet them. Grantees will be reminded that compliance will be greatly considered in the 2016-2017 application evaluation. Ms. Niemela stated that the Board will rely on Ms. Hoagland to provide information of grantees' performance and improvement efforts.

Ms. Hoagland informed the Board that the application instructions and forms will be available on the DMVA web site prior to 01 December as part of the open application process. Webinars with application instructions and information will also be scheduled from December through February, and that schedule will also be available on the web site.

Board members had submitted suggestions specific to the evaluation criteria and narrative summary guidelines. Several expressed concern that the listed criteria and guidelines did not align in regard to the number of categories, and the Board discussed the possibility of removing some items from the listed criteria. Ms. Hoagland explained that the difference in the number of categories occurs because some evaluation criteria cannot be addressed by the application, such as the geographic distribution and availability of funds. These items cannot be removed from the criteria list as the Board must consider them.

The Board discussed scoring methods for the applications, considering a Likert scale or similar rubric. Ms. Hoagland agreed to provide training on scoring methods, but emphasized that the application materials would have to be finalized at the meeting in order to publish them before 01Dec. The Board then began to align the criteria and narrative summary instructions by folding criteria into subcategories. The consensus was to use this method to make the materials easier for applicants to understand.

The Board also discussed the requirement for applicants to identify their target audience, questioning whether applicants have access to reliable data sources. Ms. Hoagland agreed to also provide links on the web site to help applicants to access census information and also the veteran population data available at va.gov. Mr. Dailey expressed concern regarding the accuracy of those figures. The Board acknowledged that the resources are imperfect but are probably the best available.

Mr. Simard moved that the Board accept the VTF application packet as revised. It was seconded by Ms. Caldwell and carried. A copy of the final application packet is attached to these minutes.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 04 Dec at 0900 hours in Fort Collins, possibly at CSU but with the location still pending. The January meeting will be discussed at that time.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:09 a.m.