



## Rationale and Approach

### Introduction

The [STATE] Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Reintegration Assistance (VRA) Program is applying for AmeriCorps program funding to improve, expand and enhance veteran services outreach, statewide. VRA proposes to establish a statewide program (VRA Program AmeriCorps) to expand and enhance local outreach services to veterans, active service members (National Guard, Reserves, Active-Duty), veterans families, and federal, state, county and local veteran services providers, working within the community. Combined with several new Electronic information initiatives, VRA proposes to leverage the knowledge, skills and abilities of (80) team members by engaging them in AmeriCorps national service positions (80 halftimes) to serve returning veterans and their families.

Veteran services have not traditionally been providing statewide through an integrated community-based model, which is problematic due to the size of [THE STATE] and the number of organizations providing services – Veterans Administration (VA), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Labor (DOL), [THE STATE] Department of Veterans Affairs, [THE STATE] National Guard, Employment Development Department (EDD), non-profit and faith based agencies.

[THE STATE] veterans returning from the conflicts in Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom – OIF) and Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom – OEF) face a significant number of physical injuries, mental health problems, and reintegration barriers to obtain affordable housing, physical and mental healthcare, living wage employment, and advanced levels of education. While these stated barriers are typical for all homeless populations, we should not lose sight of the compounded effect that both traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) place on our veterans.

A comprehensive study conducted by the RAND Corp. in 2008 found that (nationally) an estimated 18.5 percent of those back from deployment reported symptoms consistent with a diagnosis of PTSD or depression. The study also examined veterans' access to quality mental health treatment and identified gaps in the military and veteran health care systems and opportunities for improvement. A large infusion of new funds into the DOD and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) in recent years is supporting their continuing efforts to improve care. However, many returning veterans must also seek

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care in community settings as they reintegrate into civilian life. RAND identified key challenges to the provision of mental health care that cuts across community, VHA, and DOD health care settings. Mental health specialty care for conditions such as PTSD and depression are not readily available and veterans are often reluctant to seek mental health care through traditional organized systems and the existing service outlets.

Veterans Affairs estimates that of [THE STATE]'s 2,026,000 veterans, 92% are male and 8% are female. They estimate that 59,000 veterans are enrolled in higher education programs (it is estimated that about 35,000 of these veterans are enrolled at the Community College level). Nationally approximately 6,233,292 veterans utilize federal VA healthcare benefits. The VA also estimates that [THE STATE] has 29,000 homeless veterans. The VA reports that veterans typically maintain a higher unemployment rate (15%) than the general population (10%) and 29,000 are homeless. The VA also estimates that 6,500 veterans are serving time in the [THE STATE]'S prison system.

### **Mission Statement:**

VRA Program will proactively reach out to STATE veterans and to connect them with the benefits and services they have earned. The areas they will target are employment services, unemployment insurance, housing, physical and mental healthcare, and federal, state and local veteran benefits and services, including compensation and pension.

### **VRA Program AmeriCorps Team:**

Members will ensure that the veterans' healthcare eligibility is being established and that both their mental and physical healthcare needs are being addressed. Secondly, members will assist each veteran in completing the required paperwork and assist with the submission of a "benefits evaluation," which is processed through the local County Veterans Service Office (CVSO), where the members are based. Using this local "positive Contract" approach, members can make sure that each veteran is taking full advantage of their VA benefits and other programs (old and new) that are available to them, both within their local community and beyond. In addition to assisting the veterans with their federal (VA) benefits, members will also refer these veterans to the EDD One-Stop System, where they can receive resume writing assistance, job interview preparation classes and job placement assistance. Another important element of this locally based program is that our members will also be able to connect veterans with

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their local VA OEF/OIF coordinators, who are capable of connecting the veterans to a variety of new services that are specific to the OEF/OIF campaigns (new VA programs and other benefit programs).

The VRA AmeriCorps outreach program will provide “real-time” distribution and tracking of veteran contact information. This will also provide [THE STATE] with a feedback loop for VRA AmeriCorps performance, through the submission of required weekly performance/update reports, detailing the progress of veteran contact, updated information, and program referral(s).

These new web-based information retrieval and distribution programs are on the cutting-edge of veterans services outreach, providing real-time information with multiple follow-up methods, and detailed reporting. Combining the new information systems and the VRA Program workforce will help to create a “high-tech and high-touch” veteran outreach model that is unprecedented in our nation’s history and will be a “best-practices” model that can be replicated in other states across the country.

Combined with new electronic information initiatives, VRA Program proposes to leverage the knowledge, skills, and abilities 80 AmeriCorps members who, as veterans themselves or family members of veterans, will continue to serve their country in part-time positions.

The VRA AmeriCorps members will be provided veteran services outreach information through the VRA Program on a weekly basis, which will provide very detailed information about veterans recently discharged in their Regional Collaborative Partnership areas. Placed at the VRA Program, AmeriCorps Team members’ main function is to help recently separated veterans in four primary areas: healthcare, education, housing and other concerns such as financial and legal assistance.

Through their service at the community level, members will make a positive difference for veterans, service members, veteran families, and community-based veterans service providers, by closing the gap between what is needed and what is available and by attempting to enlist 1,000 community volunteers to assist in accomplishing VRA Program goals of making sure that all discharging veterans are connected to the services that they need to make a successful transition to civilian life and avoid the

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unemployment, mental and physical health problems, high divorce rate and homelessness that now plagues this very deserving element of our population.

AmeriCorps members will be placed in teams of two in most cases at the VRA Program's local office, where they will work side by side with other community-based veteran service partners. The members will play a unique role, where they will directly interface with local VA, HUD, DOL, State, County, and other faith-based and non-profit care providers and agency representatives, to create a common link for all veterans outreach services at the local level.

The VRA AmeriCorps program will be the first such program in [THE STATE] (and will serve as a national model) capable of integrating veterans service information in "real time" and will thereby create a more responsive system that will in-turn; increase veteran suicide prevention capabilities, expedite veteran mental health referrals, and increase awareness of veteran family assistance programs. Essentially, the VRA AmeriCorps program, with its new electronic, web-based systems and newly established, highly trained workforce will begin the work of reshaping the future of how veteran services are communicated, tracked and reported.

AmeriCorps members will have several contact options based on the varied information systems being implemented. Typically, AmeriCorps members will use email and telephone as the primary method of contacting the veteran or the family member. However, in some cases they may need to make face-to-face contact, to make sure the veterans needs are being met and that they are both aware of the veteran (VA) benefits available to them and are making progress within the specific areas of need.

We believe that the VRA AmeriCorps outreach program can help with accurately counting the number of veterans in each of these special needs areas. We further believe that the VRA AmeriCorps will help expedite [THE STATE] (county services) ability to get veteran eligibility established and therefore speed up the delivery of services and benefits.

### **Description of Activities and Member Roles:**

Each member will be assigned a caseload of the most currently discharged veterans in their area. The VRA AmeriCorps Team member will then make direct contact with the newly discharged veterans, using

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the information provided to address any needs or services identified by the veteran. VRA AmeriCorps Team members will use email and telephone as the primary method of contacting the veteran. However, in some cases they may make appointments to meet face to face ensure the veteran is aware of the benefits available and s/he is making progress within an identified area of need, such as receiving treatment for post-traumatic stress syndrome. In addition, VRA AmeriCorps Team members connect veterans with their local Veteran Administration (VA) OEF/OIF coordinators, who specifically work with veterans and connect them to a variety of services specific to the OEF/OIF campaign. The mission of the VRA Program is to develop a cadre of experts in veteran services, benefits and resources to become the catalyst to a smooth transition to a productive and healthy civilian life. VRA AmeriCorps members welcome home each returning veteran, with follow-up contact to a minimum of three times in the first 12 months, to assure that veterans and their families are connected to resources and benefits they've earned. This mission is captured through the motto: "You served, now let us serve you."

VRA AmeriCorps members will provide local veteran services information to veterans, veteran families, and veteran service providers. Members will provide veteran services training as needed within each local community. This integrated service model will expand and enhance veteran services by "filling service gaps" such as; after-hours services, weekend outreach programs, and community-based veteran friendly locations; community centers, religious establishments (churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, etc.), member organization sites (VFW, American Legion, Veterans Halls) and national-guard and military reserve centers.

### **Measureable Outputs and Outcomes:**

This program will address the Veterans priority and will be using standard performance measures. This program will count the number of veterans who are discharged at the 24 TAP sites in [THE STATE] (estimated at 30,000) in a calendar year. AmeriCorps members will then count the number of veterans that they make contact with and track the outcome of that contact. This count will be performed daily and reported monthly through VRA Program reporting channels. The Second measurement will be done by the AmeriCorps members who will track the involvement of the discharging veterans in the education, non-profit and faith based organizations. This will also be reported on a monthly basis. We will track and report the number of homeless veterans, referral and the outcome. We will also track the number of veterans with substance abuse, financial and family problems along with the referral and the

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outcome of that referral. AmeriCorps members will receive Veteran Re-integration Questionnaires from recently discharged veterans through the VRA Program which will be used as the primary method of tracking and reporting AmeriCorps member outputs and outcomes. Using this system on the local level, members will develop and report local dashboard information to community partners and the centralized leadership team in [THE STATE]. By combining the AmeriCorps member information with the state and federal level information (active-duty military bases, the 24 Veteran Transition Assistance Program (TAP) sites, various National Guard & Reserve Armories, and STATE Community Colleges, various Vet Centers, and One-Stop Program sites), STATE leaders and stake-holders can have a real-time, highly detailed census information on veterans needing, housing, education, healthcare, and employment. This system is up and running and we get reports now that give us this information. It has been running successfully since June 2009.



## National Performance Measures

### Priority Area: Veterans and Military Families

**Performance Measure Title:** V1 Veterans receiving service and assistance

**Service Category:** Other Human Needs

#### Strategy to Achieve Results

Briefly describe how you will achieve this result (Max 4,000 chars.)

Veterans are referred through the reintegration process. Member works with veteran based on the assessment of the reintegration form e.g. healthcare, education, benefits, housing, and other concerns.

#### Result: Output

Result.

Veterans will receive services and assistance [excluding education and employment]

Indicator: V1: Veterans receiving services and assistance.

Target: 15,000 veterans will receive services and assistance [excluding education and employment]

Target Value: 15,000

Instruments: VRA Program Reporting system

PM Statement: 15,000 veterans will receive services and assistance [excluding education and employment]

#### Result: Intermediate Outcome

Result.

Veterans successfully participate or successfully complete services [excluding education and employment]

Indicator: Percentage of veterans who successfully participate or successfully complete services

Target: 75% (11,250/15,000) Veterans will successfully participate or successfully complete services [excluding education and employment]

Target Value: 12,500

Instruments: VRA Program Reporting system

PM Statement: 75% (11,250/15,000) Veterans will successfully participate or successfully complete services [excluding education and employment]