

**TVC RESPONSE TO SUNSET REPORT
ISSUE 1
APRIL 2018**

ISSUE 1

TVC Lacks the Proactive Planning and Necessary Information to Regularly Evaluate and Improve Services to Veterans.

FINDINGS

TVC does not regularly plan across all agency programs to ensure it best meets the changing needs of Texas veterans.

Lacking program-specific planning

TVC Response: TVC has placed much effort and resources to ensure the agency's strategic planning process is sound and establishes the areas of focus for each program. Each program was involved in developing the agency's strategic plan; however, most programs took an informal approach to their own specific operational planning for each biennium.

Program leaders worked with their budget analyst, the human resources department, as well as the agency's training team to determine its goals, priorities and needs for each fiscal year. This planning was not a formally documented process but an informal process which used historical data to support future efforts.

TVC concurs with sunset review's assessment that the Veteran Employment Services annual planning process is efficiently executed and therefore all TVC programs will use it as a model.

Currently, TVC is gathering information from staff members to ensure a comprehensive planning process is utilized. The information obtained will create the annual "Operational Plan," which is presently being drafted by each program. The plan will focus on consistency, while allowing for each program's individuality. It will forecast program requirements for resources based on historical data and the shifting needs of veterans within the State of Texas.

Underused needs assessment

TVC Response: TVC has queried each program's leadership for feedback to determine operational direction. While TVC recognizes the need for a more robust evaluation of veterans' needs, we do as an agency and program specific, have collaborative meetings to understand from our staff, stakeholders, and veterans about additional needs that are not being met.

TVC recently held a collaborative forum with federal, state and private entities, who also serve veterans, to discuss the needs that are being missed and better ways to meet those needs in the State of Texas.

TVC also chairs the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services which was established by the 82nd legislature to coordinate the activities of state agencies that assist veterans, servicemembers, and their families. The council also coordinates outreach efforts that ensure that veterans, servicemembers, and their families are made aware of services and facilitates collaborative relationships among state, federal, and local agencies and private organizations. A biennial report is issued each biennium to the Governor, LT. Governor and Speaker.

TVC agrees that the agency is missing some valuable information by not having a needs-based assessment available in a variety of formats. TVC is addressing this concern by; (1) identifying the different assessments currently being utilized within the agency; (2) leveraging partnerships with other Veteran Service Organizations; and (3) determining the appropriate avenue to ensure that every veteran has accessibility to the assessment.

TVC does not collect key information needed to monitor how well its programs serve veterans needs.

Not assessing true program outcomes

TVC Response: Historically, TVC has utilized the approach of serving as many veterans as possible to ensure that veterans are receiving the benefits they have earned through their military service. TVC is working with the Legislative Budget Board to balance the quantitative nature of performance with a qualitative approach during this current strategic planning cycle.

Lacking regular surveys of veterans.

TVC Response: Formally surveying its clients and the state's general veteran population will allow the agency to better focus service delivery in light of its limited resources. Also, each program reaching out to veterans they serve will help prioritize efforts in training, staffing, and improving customer service.

No complaint process

TVC Response: TVC currently responds to complaints by allowing each program to address them at their level. However, TVC recognizes the need for a formal centralized process. As such, a formal centralized process has been drafted for inclusion into the TVC Policy and Procedures Manual.

The TVCCR-1, Customer Complaint Resolution Form will be placed on the TVC website and available to all employees in the event they receive a complaint.

Upon completion of the form, the customer or employee will email the form to complaints@tvc.texas.gov, which sends the complaint to the executive assistant's office.

Within 24 hours of receiving the complaint, it will be distributed to the appropriate program director/manager for prompt attention and complaint resolution. The TVCCR-1 complaint form will be updated with the agency's response and the program director will sign the form. The form will be submitted to the Deputy/Division Director (as appropriate) for a final review and close-out of the complaint.

ISSUE 1 RECCOMENDATIONS

Require TVC to annually evaluate and set priorities for all programs.

TVC Response: TVC will formalize its program specific strategic and operational planning processes. These processes will include an annual review and feedback from stakeholders.

Require TVC to create and track meaningful outcome measures for all programs.

TVC Response: TVC is currently evaluating all key and non-key performance measures to address any inefficiencies. TVC will conduct an evaluation and analysis on a yearly basis and work with the Legislative Budget Board to seek potential improvements.

MANAGEMENT ACTION

Direct TVC to survey Texas veterans on a regular basis about their experience with agency programs and overall needs.

TVC Response: TVC will develop a formal process for surveying its clients and the state's general veteran population. This will allow the agency to better focus service delivery and its limited resources to improve training and customer service.

TVC will utilize current veteran needs assessments obtained by the Department of Veteran Affairs as well as pursuing other means to identify the needs of veterans. Each program will also evaluate how they address the needs of veterans within their scope of work.

Direct TVC to create a complaint process, make the complaint process accessible to the public, and track complaint data.

TVC Response: TVC will ensure a complaint process is in place utilizing TVC's website and ensuring the tracking of complaint data. Also, TVC will ensure proper follow-up communication is in place in order to better respond to issues in a timely manner.

**TVC RESPONSE TO SUNSET REPORT
ISSUE 2
APRIL 2018**

ISSUE 2

TVC's Status Quo Approach to Claims Counseling Does Not Maximize State Resources to Best Serve Veterans.

FINDINGS

TVC has not strategically managed the state's significant investment in claims staff.

No formal workload analysis and staffing adjustments.

TVC Response: The TVC claims program currently conducts quarterly performance and workload assessments to identify and manage staffing needs and training requirements. We are working on transitioning to a formal and routine process for performance and workload analysis. TVC recently acquired electronic claims management software which will improve the ability to analyze office workload.

Special teams not targeted as intended

TVC Response: The purpose of the state strike force and fully developed claims teams is to reduce the number of backlogged disability claims and the time it takes the VA to process a claim. As the number of backlogged claims decreased, TVC proactively evaluated the team's priorities to achieve this goal. The state strike force teams reviewed all TVC claims to develop them into fully developed claims (FDC) or decision ready claims (DRC). This significantly reduced VA processing times and prevented them from becoming backlogged claims. The state strike force teams are also working with the VA in the new rapid appeals modernization program to reduce the backlog of appeals.

Lacking information for staff

TVC Response: In 2016, TVC Claims Counseling & Representation restructured its program from two state-wide regions into four districts to better communicate internally, as well as communication with community stakeholders/partners including Veteran County Services Officers.

The TVC Claims Director used many informal methods for communicating and sharing information, which included conducting conference calls with district managers every two weeks to share best practices, receiving feedback from staff on all aspect of claims, and utilizing experienced personnel to share their knowledge during training events.

TVC Claims program recognizes the need to formalize many of these processes. They also identified a need for a policy and performance specialist who will formalize consistent processes, procedures, and sharing of best practices. This will allow the program to capitalize on the vast experiences of tenured employees, as well as providing program consistency.

The commission fails to collect and analyze claims outcome data needed to improve program effectiveness and respond to changing needs.

Lacking outcome information

TVC Response: TVC is currently working with the Legislative Budget Board to transition from quantity-based to quality-based performance measures. Historically, the TVC Claims Representation & Counseling Program has been reliant upon the Department of Veterans Affairs for most of its data. The addition of the newly acquired electronic claims management software will assist with the capturing of much needed data and will allow the program to be independent of the Department of Veteran Affairs for information.

Limited evaluation and reporting

TVC Response: In 2017, TVC recognized the need for enhanced data analysis and took action to establishing a policy and performance specialist position. This position will also analyze current and past performance trends to assist in decision-making. Additionally, the newly acquired electronic claims management software will improve our ability to track and analyze performance data.

TVC has not taken basic steps to modernize the customer service experience for veterans and increase overall efficiency.

Limited online information to prepare for claims visits

TVC Response: TVC recognizes the need for basic information to help educate clients about the claims process and will ensure this needed information is added to the agency's website to enhance and improve the customer's experience. This will also assist clients to be prepared before visiting a TVC office, ultimately reducing the visit and the need to reschedule clients.

No appointments for claims counseling.

TVC Response: While TVC recognizes the benefit of an appointment process for clients, the unpredictability, complexity and length of each veterans claims office visit can vary greatly, which could create delays in scheduled appointments resulting in customer dissatisfaction.

ISSUE 2 RECCOMENDATIONS

Change in Statute

Require TVC to track, evaluate, and strategically adjust claims staffing and special teams.

TVC Response: TVC will transition from an informal to a formalized process when evaluating, tracking, and adjusting staffing levels for all teams within the Claims Representation & Counseling program. Staff will utilize information from the newly acquired electronic claims management software. They will also assign the newly added policy and performance specialist to this formal process.

Require TVC to better track and analyze claims outcome data to guide program success.

TVC Response: TVC is currently working with the Legislative Budget Board to transition from quantity-based to quality-based measures. TVC will leverage the newly acquired electronic claims management software to better track outcomes as well as perform trend-based analysis.

Remove military service requirements for Veteran County Service Officers to expand the pool of potential accredited claims counselors for Texas veterans.

TVC Response: TVC has no comment on this action.

Management Action

Direct TVC to temporarily report on claims staffing and outcome data analyses.

TVC Response: TVC will develop two reports over the next four years outlining staffing levels and the effectiveness of special teams. The first report will be presented to the commissioners in the first quarter of 2019 and the second report will be presented in the first quarter of 2021.

Direct TVC to strengthen support for claims staff and preserve institutional knowledge.

TVC Response: TVC will provide training and clear reference materials to claims staff. TVC will also ensure claims district managers share best practices, identify areas where more training is needed, and document TVC special teams and overall program processes that will be included in the claims annual operational plan.

Direct TVC to add information to its website about the claims process, including forms, checklists, basic claims information, and embedded VA resources.

TVC Response: TVC will add clear and useful information to its website for easy access to clients. This information will be useful for clients before visiting a TVC office. The information that will be added to the website will include, but not limited to, the following: documentation

checklist, a step-by-step guide to filing claims, answers to frequently asked questions, and Department of Veteran Affairs resources.

Direct TVC to allow veterans to pre-schedule appointments for claims counseling, while maintaining the option for walk-in services.

TVC Response: TVC will implement an appointment policy, while continuing to allow customers to access services on a walk-in basis. Staff will allow customers to make appointments with the objective to reduce the number of customers unable to served.

**TVC RESPONSE TO SUNSET REPORT
ISSUE 3
APRIL 2018**

ISSUE 3:

TVC's Grant Program Needs Improvements to Promote Overall Effectiveness and Transparency.

FINDINGS

A short grant cycle limits TVC's ability to effectively evaluate grantee performance and provide technical assistance.

One-year cycle focuses effort on administrative process instead of performance

TVC Response: TVC is working to develop a plan to increase the FVA grant cycle to two years that which will include extensive revisions to administrative rules and require commission approval.

Limited attention on technical assistance and compliance

TVC Response: Technical assistance is provided to high risk and struggling grantees as identified by the FVA compliance office. Technical assistance is also provided at request of the grantees. FVA works to provide exceptional customer service to all its applicants and grantees.

Funding stability allows for longer awards

TVC Response: 89% of our funding is derived from scratch-off lottery ticket sales. Historical data indicates that funding levels should be stable, and projections indicate an increase in sales revenue.

A lack of policies and training for advisory committee members and commissioners risks subjective decisions.

Insufficient guidance on advisory committee role

TVC Response: The FVA Advisory Committee prepares the funding recommendation for the Commissioners. They are guided by the Commissioners' priorities and assisted by the FVA Staff to execute their role. FVA will improve its training processes to committee members to ensure an improved understanding of advisory committee roles, responsibilities and actions.

No conflict of interest policy for commissioners

TVC Response: FVA in conjunction with TVC General Counsel, will implement a FVA grant conflict of interest policy for commission members.

TVC lacks measures to gauge whether grantees are effectively using state funds to serve veterans.

TVC Response: As a result of newly acquired grant software, TVC FVA will be better able to analyze grantee performance and service outcomes for clients.

ISSUE 3 RECCOMENDATIONS

Management Action

Direct TVC to extend the length of its grant cycle from one to two years.

TVC Response: TVC concurs and is working to develop implementation plans to increase the FVA grant cycle to two years. To accomplish this transition, TVC will revise its administrative rules for the FVA.

Direct the agency to formalize the roles and training of the commission and the grants advisory committee to improve quality and transparency in the evaluation process.

TVC Response: TVC will formalize roles and improve training to commission and advisory committee members.

Direct TVC to develop and track enhanced grantee performance measures to better evaluate the benefit of its grant funding to veterans.

TVC Response: TVC will require increased reporting requirements and performance measures from grantees to improve their outcome measures.

TVC RESPONSE TO SUNSET REPORT

ISSUE 4

APRIL 2018

ISSUE 4

TVC Prioritizes a Costly Annual Conference Over Training Targeted to Better Meet Veterans' Needs.

FINDINGS

TVC's approach to training wastes limited resources.

Overreliance on one staff-wide annual conference.

TVC Response: TVC is working to reorganize its program training to allow for more frequent and regionally-based opportunities. This will allow for more quality and effective training, while keeping all TVC field offices open to ensure service delivery is not disrupted.

High cost of the annual conference.

TVC Response: Costs for the annual statewide conference has increased in response to the rise in participants and specific conference venue requirements. TVC can reduce overall costs associated with inhouse training by providing more frequent and regionally-based opportunities while prioritizing attendance based on training requirements.

Significant staff time devoted to planning annual conference.

TVC Response: TVC will create more efficiencies in the use of the training and event management team's resources. The team will partner with agency programs in developing fiscal year training schedules and plans that will allow the training team to better plan, prioritize, and support training initiatives and events.

Failure to track detailed conference and other training costs.

TVC Response: TVC is implementing procedures to more accurately capture costs and cost drivers associated with seminars, conference, workshops, and regional training. Agency programs will be required to submit annual training plans with appropriate cost estimates at the start of the fiscal year.

TVC does not meet other training needs with little time and resources left after the annual conference.

TVC Response: With the removal of a single statewide conference, the training and event management team is better positioned to support programs in identifying more targeted and effective training opportunities, modalities, and performance-based curriculum.

Despite the potential for cost savings and better availability for far-flung staff, TVC has not maximized online training opportunities.

TVC Response: TVC is continuing to identify and implement eLearning and online training opportunities including webinars; virtual teleconferences; and self-paced eLearning modules. Several programs have already been using online communication tools (e.g., Skype, GoToMeeting/Webinar) to provide information updates and similar training to staff.

TVC does not effectively target state training resources provided to veteran county service officers.

TVC Response: TVC has drafted proposed rules for the professional development of veteran county service officers (VCSOs) which will provide greater flexibility to the VCSOs while reducing costs for TVC. The rules are currently available for public comment and will be presented to the TVC Commissioners during May 2018 for possible adoption. If adopted, the rules will become effective July 1, 2018.

ISSUE 4 RECCOMENDATIONS

Management Action

Direct TVC to restructure and streamline the scope and expense of its annual conference.

TVC Response: TVC has already begun restructuring the annual conference. TVC will no longer host a single week-long event, rather will host four to five regional training opportunities. Focus will be placed on more effective collaboration, resource sharing, customer needs identification, and service delivery across all programs rather than program-centric training. Regional trainings will allow for reduction in travel and hotel costs and meeting space rentals, while allowing the agency to receive bids from venues that can support smaller groups and realize an increased cost-benefit ratio.

TVC will ensure all offices remain open to the public during training events and will rotate staff attendance as appropriate. TVC will prioritize the need for agency staff attendance (e.g., new hires, service providers, leadership) dependent upon the conference objective and curriculum and benefit to the attendee and sponsoring program.

VCSO attendance will be funded only for those who have not yet completed annual training requirements.

Direct TVC to track and analyze detailed training costs to identify potential savings and improvements.

TVC Response: TVC has already begun identifying methods and processes to accurately capture and report training costs. Policies and procedure will be developed and implemented by the start of FY19.

Direct TVC to prioritize online training and other cost-effective tools to facilitate regular collaboration among staff and partners.

TVC Response: All TVC programs will continue to collaborate with the training and event management team to expand its use of online training opportunities for their staff and partners. TVC will document their online training procedures in their annual operational plan.

**TVC RESPONSE TO SUNSET REPORT
ISSUE 5
APRIL 2018**

ISSUE 5

Texas Has a Continuing Need for the Texas Veterans Commission.

FINDINGS

Texas has a continuing need to help veterans access federal benefits and navigate state services.

TVC Response: TVC concurs

Benefit claims assistance

TVC Response: TVC concurs

Federal programs

TVC Response: TVC concurs

Coordination role

TVC Response: TVC concurs

Texas has effectively consolidated most veteran services under a single state agency, offering little benefit from further organizational change.

Veterans' Land Board

TVC Response: TVC concurs

Texas Workforce Commission

TVC Response: TVC concurs

Other states

TVC Response: No comment

The commission's statute does not reflect updated requirements for commission member training.

TVC Response: TVC will update and implement across-the-board training requirements related to commission member training.

The commission's reporting requirements continue to be useful

TVC Response: TVC concurs

The agency should continue to implement state cybersecurity requirements and industry best practices

TVC Response: TVC concurs

ISSUE #5 RECCOMENDATIONS

Change in Statute

Continue the Texas Veterans Commission for 12 years.

TVC Response: TVC concurs

Update the standard across-the-board requirement related to commission member training.

TVC Response: TVC will update and implement across-the-board training requirements related to commission member training.

Management Action

The commission should implement requirements for encouraging purchasing from historically underutilized businesses.

TVC Response: While TVC has exceeded state-wide HUB goals, TVC will work to improve its good faith efforts to increase purchases from historically underutilized businesses for professional and other services and will appoint a designated HUB coordinator.