

## Six-Month Progress Report on, and Evaluation of, the SPC Project

The best way to start this analysis of the SPC's plan to research and review services provided by other county VACs, is to refer to the following founding documents:

1. Chairperson (CP) Knudtson's minutes for the September 15<sup>th</sup> SPC meeting, which listed three agreed-upon goals on page 3
2. Superintendent (Supt) Soto's prototype Excel spreadsheet, provided October 25<sup>th</sup>, with rows for specific types of information she had identified the day before

These and other relevant documents may be found in the OneDrive album.

The SPC's first goal was to compare VACCC with its collar counties (Lake, DuPage and Will) plus other counties based on the size of their budgets and other attributes like the nature of their communities, i.e. urban v. rural. Early research showed it would not be so easy to get consistent, accurate numbers even for something as simple as the veteran population per county. (See the "By County" research folder containing online claims by the VACs themselves, the Census Bureau, etc.) CP Knudtson solved the problem by supplying a VA source, which was chosen as the standard. Coincidentally, there was a shift to simplify this goal by just comparing VACCC with the ten next counties having the greatest number of veteran residents.

The second goal specified the kinds of data to be collected. From the outset, some of these had to be changed because many VAC reports were not broken down to the needed level of detail. As with the first goal, this issue alerted us to the problem of recording Qualitative and Quantitative information on the same form. (This will be addressed later when the spreadsheet is reviewed.) For example, even if we could compute a VAC's per capita average distribution, there was not enough detail in its reports to allow a second calculation of the dollar amount of assistance per type of service. We only began to report our calculations of budget dollars per veteran in a county on our spreadsheet around January 21. Where possible, we later added a calculation of the average dollars of Direct Financial Aid per veteran for each county.

The SPC's third goal identified the sources to be used in collecting data. The first three were relatively easy to find; however, that did not mean they provided the figures we sought. Even though VACs are required to file annual reports with the Governor's Office, no published copies could be found in most cases. Folders for each VAC, containing scans of relevant information from those sources, have also been uploaded to OneDrive. Each SFC member has been sent a link for access. No interviews of VAC Superintendents were conducted, so that remains an option to discuss.

Even though many format changes have been made, Supt Soto's Excel prototype spreadsheet has remained a steady framework for collecting all the information desired so far by her and other SFC members. If, however, the SPC wants to add more Qualitative information (like a detailed description of the transportation services provided in each county under the SERVICES AND PROGRAMS heading) or more Quantitative data (like the previously-mentioned dollar amount of financial assistance per service under the TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES heading), we need help from somebody like Peter Bencak, who helped create VACCC's "January 2023 Report afm.pdf" which Supt Soto recently sent out.

Despite the lack of uniform reporting standards for VACs and the lack of more detailed disclosures by them concerning amounts they have spent on specific programs, enough progress has been made to draw some conclusions:

1. VACCC reports contain far more details than those of the other VACs found on public sources.
2. VACCC stands out for its lack of VSOs. Research easily documented that VSOs were on the staff of all but two of the other VACs. Those VACs proudly report the amount of benefits obtained on behalf of veterans they had served. Madison and Kane counties claimed, respectively, \$4.65 million and \$5.8 million for 2022 while Will announced a VSO Award Log of \$122 million from 2015 to June 2022.
3. VACCC is underfunded.
  - a. While the VACCC's annual budget only averaged about \$2.73 per veteran, the budgets for the other ten VACs averaged from \$16 to \$43 per veteran. The majority, six out of ten, ranged from \$35 to \$43 per veteran.
  - b. While the VACCC's average amount of Direct Financial Aid was just \$1.56 per veteran, the averages for six of the others were \$1.32, \$3.56, \$3.75, \$4.41, \$8.50 and \$19.00 while there was insufficient data to calculate an amount for the other four VACs.

This report has suggested some additional steps the SPC may wish to take:

1. No new research has been conducted since February 1<sup>st</sup>, but before starting again, it should ask SPC membership for input, corrections and thoughts about what needs to be done next.
2. It could request interviews of other VAC Superintendents.
3. It could seek assistance from IACVAC to help develop a standard report and to encourage VACs to use it.
4. It could ask the Governor's Office to make annual VSO reports easily accessible.

Wayne K. Kern  
VFW Post 1337  
Representative  
March 14, 2023