



To Serve Those Who Served

Veteran's Service #19

BUDGET SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS:

The Veteran's Department has a proposed budget of \$134,748 which is an increase of 8% over the 2021 budget. This increase is due to payroll expenses and a request for a short-term intern in 2022. Revenues are projected at \$11,550 (Increased in 2022) which results in an 8.5% increase in the levy request at \$123,198. Michelle Anderson continues as the ½ time Veterans Benefits Specialist.

FUNCTION:

The Bayfield County Veterans Service Office assists Veterans in applying for Federal, State and County benefits they have earned through their honorable service to our nation. Duties and responsibilities of the County Veterans Service Office are covered under Wisconsin Statute 45.80.

Mission Statement

To provide Bayfield County Veterans with tailored, comprehensive services.

Vision Statement

Individually connect with all Veterans in Bayfield County. Provide education on benefits, empower independence and self-reliance while advocating for the Veteran.

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES:

Assist veterans in receiving VA benefits to include disability compensation, pensions, health care, GI Bill education and training, life insurance, home loan certificates of eligibility, vocational rehabilitation, subsistence aid grants, entrance into State veteran's homes, burial and grave marker benefits. Outreach and marketing to communities via speaking engagements such as VFW and American Legion posts. Outreach to homebound veterans. Coordinate and facilitate transportation to VA medical appointments. The County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) collaborates with multiple entities to maximize opportunities and benefits for Veterans. This includes Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), Vet Centers, VA healthcare physicians, nurses and coordinators, Department of Human Services, ADRC, VFW, American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, non-profit organizations, Regional Hospice, NW CEP and Job Center, Veterans Employment Representative, Congressman Tiffany, State Senators, Legislators and Assembly, The Lakes Community Health Center, Veterans Cemeteries, Veterans Homes, and CVSO peers.

FY2021 ACCOMPLISHMENTS and PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

1. Outreach Services throughout the year: Outreach to veterans has been on hold since the spring of 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions. As of August 1, 2021 we reinitiated our

outreach efforts. Kevin returned to speaking at posts, holding office hours at Cable American Legion, Red Cliff VFW and Iron River VFW, and home visits.

2. Training: Training for our department is on-going. In order to access data from the VA and work collaboratively with Veterans service organizations, accreditation is necessary. Maintaining this accreditation requires continuing education units earned through national conferences, bi-annual state conferences, and quarterly regional conferences. All in-person training events were cancelled throughout the past year due to COVID. Although we have been able to maintain our accreditation through various remotely hosted events, we will be returning to an in-person conference in October.
3. “Paperless” Goal: We are recently making great strides toward this goal. The CVSO office is currently involved in transitioning to a new veterans database software. This office has used Vetraspec for many years without ever accomplishing a truly paperless system. Vetpro is the software we’re moving to. It features the original VA direct submission function and a unique electronic signature capability that allows the veteran to sign documents electronically remotely or in the office. External documents are scanned and stored electronically. All claims are now submitted to the VA electronically via Vetpro’s direct upload process. These electronic processes save us hundreds of dollars a year in postage. To date, over half of the older paper files have been converted to electronic files. We will continue this conversion process until complete.
4. Outreach/Treatment Programs: Through contacts with the National Park Service (NPS), WI DNR, Wounded Warriors in Action, Veterans Outdoors and Beyond, and English River Outfitters, I have become involved in many local events/programs designed to promote getting Veterans involved in the outdoors with the goal of creating “healing through nature” experiences. All of these programs were cancelled in 2020 due to COVID. Many returned to near-normal in 2021 and hopes are for complete normalcy in 2022.
5. Partnership and collaboration at local, State and Federal level. Our office has been extremely successful in developing partnerships. Collaboration with the Ashland Area Development Corporation and other key partners is leading to a Veteran entrepreneur program. This program has provided many benefits to Veterans interested in starting their own business. I’m also hoping this program will lead to more Veterans staying in the region when returning from service.
6. Through a 2020 grant we were able to bring an intern on board to work on outreach via electronic means. Several informative/educational videos were produced and distributed via email, the County website, and our Facebook page. Budget cuts for 2021 eliminated the possibility of hiring an intern. We are planning to continue to reach out to our veterans in this virtual manner into 2022 as well as use the intern to assist with file conversion..

Our office has partnered with the ADRC on several critical cases. This has resulted in Veterans receiving the services needed so they remain safe and receive benefits such as health care and social security.

We have a strong partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA). This collaboration is critical to ensuring that we are providing the best possible services to our Veterans. The virtual visit by Secretary Kolar helped to cement this relationship.

On a Federal level, we are currently in collaboration with regard to providing mental health counseling through the Vet Centers in LaCrosse and Duluth and the Veterans Health Administration from Minneapolis. We currently have telehealth technology in place and working in our office. This is important as it can show other Veterans the ease in which these appointments can happen and hopefully many more Veterans will begin using this technology.

7. Throughout 2020 & 2021, COVID forced advancements in remote access to VA services. This office is equipped for veterans to participate in tele-health appointments with the VA. This system can also be used for remote hearing when arguing a disability claim. We are hoping to continue expanding the use of this technology in 2022 as we realize the convenience and effectiveness of these electronic forms of communication.

Goals and Objectives 2022

1. Expanded outreach, education and marketing activities
 - a. Scheduled outreach to Cable, Iron River, Red Cliff. Outreach in additional areas as identified.
 - b. Planned events for Memorial Day, Veterans Day and County Fair.
 - c. Participate in job training education and outreach.
 - d. Frequent posts to CVSO Facebook page. Continue to create and post instruction videos to FB and YouTube.
 - e. Quarterly updates to web site.
 - f. Quarterly articles to local newspapers.
 - g. Public speaking at posts, schools and events.
2. Continue efficiencies through use of technology.
 - a. Application of Fully Developed Claims for Veterans.
 - b. Utilization of VetPro software system for all case management activities.
 - c. Scan paper files into VetPro digital format.
3. Increase knowledge and diversity of services
 - a. Increased utilization of VetPro program for case management.
 - b. Implementation of Telehealth mental health counseling services.
 - c. Regular training activities for staff via webinar, NW CVSO meetings, CVSO conferences and VA website.
 - d. Maintenance of Accreditation with Service Organizations.
4. Continue building collaborative relationships with outside agencies/organizations
 - a. "Outside-the-box" solutions can be of huge benefit to Veterans.
 - b. Combined resources critical to complete issue resolution.

Kevin Johnson, CVSO

Michelle Anderson, Veterans Benefits Specialist