

Appendix 16

Index of Recommendations

Implementation Timeframe

Priority recommendations are highlighted in green.

Implementation

P = Program, O = Organizational, WP = Work Process, IC = Integrating Capacities

Near Mid Long

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS				
P-1	Eligibility			
P-1.1	Use Chapter 36 Counseling benefits as part of the triage process for administering the use of Chapter 31 for pre-discharged military members and post-discharged veterans. (Near-Term)	x		
P-1.2	Remove the limiting periods for use of Chapter 36 counseling benefits. (Near-Term)	x		
P-1.3	Establish a system to accelerate the delivery of Chapter 31 rehabilitation services to those veterans in most critical need by changing the definitions of 38 U.S.C §§ 3101 and 3102. (Mid-Term)		x	
P-2	Employment			
P-2.1	Implement a new, five-track employment-driven VR&E service delivery system and a broad-based strategy to consistently communicate to veterans and stakeholders that the purpose of the VR&E Program is employment. (Mid-Term to Long-Term; Priority)		x	x
P-2.2	Create the position of VR&E Assistant Director for Employment Services to provide leadership and elevate the visibility and importance of veterans' employment within VA and to outside stakeholders. (See Recommendation on Central Office Organization and Staffing.) (Near-Term)	x		
P-2.3	Create new staff positions and add staff for an Employment Readiness Specialist (56 FTE) and a Marketing and Placement Specialist (56 FTE) to facilitate implementation of the five-track employment-driven service delivery model. (See Recommendations on Workforce Management and Chapter 4.) (Near-Term to Long-Term)	x	x	x
P-2.4	Transfer the 45 FTE Employment Specialist positions in VR&E back to professional counseling positions. (See Recommendations on Workforce Management.) (Near-Term to Long-Term)	x	x	x
P-2.5	Develop new policies and procedures to implement the new, five-track employment-driven service delivery system with priority given to Guard and Reservist in Tracks 1 and 2. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		

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		Near	Mid	Long
P-2.6	Develop and implement initial and recurring training programs for Employment Marketing and Placement Specialists and Employment Readiness Specialists. (Near-Term)	x		
P-2.7	Make better use of special appointing authorities to help veterans obtain federal employment. (Mid-Term)		x	
P-2.8	Provide an interim information system capability and long-term solution to support a redesigned comprehensive employment services program. (See Recommendations on Information Technology.) (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
P-2.9	Enhance existing online employment services. (Near-Term)	x		
P-3	Independent Living			
P-3.1	Establish a VR&E Service CO staff position dedicated to lead and manage the IL program. (Near-Term)	x		
P-3.2	Create and staff Independent Living Specialists positions with personnel experienced in social work, counseling psychology, and disability. (See Recommendation on Workforce Management.) (Near-Term)	x		
P-3.3	Review IL “best practices” such as those implemented in Tampa VAMC and the St. Petersburg VARO as well as various state models as exemplified by the State of Alabama Independent Living Program. (Near-Term)	x		
P-3.4	Provide consistent and uniform training for IL specialists. (See Recommendation on Training.) (Near-Term)	x		
P-3.5	Initially, focus VHA/VR&E integration on Centers of Excellence for spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, blind rehabilitation, and stroke. Establish protocols for a VHA/VR&E team approach (One VA) under the leadership of the IL specialist. (Mid-Term)		x	
P-3.6	Review funding sources and create and maintain an inventory of IL services and assistive technology devices that can be provided across VA. (Mid-Term)		x	
P-3.7	Initiate a study of the population of veterans currently in the VR&E IL Program and those receiving IL services; use this data and other research to develop estimates of the future demand for IL services and the types of services that might be needed to support veterans. (Mid-Term)		x	

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P-4	Partnerships			
P-4.1	Establish a Veterans Rehabilitation and Employment Working Group led by VA Central Office and composed of representatives from VHA, VBA and VR&E, DOL, DoD and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation to develop and implement local, regional, and national policies, strategies, and plans for continued collaboration and improved integration of rehabilitation and employment of veterans with disabilities. (Mid-Term)		x	
P-4.2	Initiate a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to facilitate formal partnerships with state vocational rehabilitation agencies to leverage employment opportunities for veterans with disabilities. (Near-Term)	x		
P-4.3	Establish a pilot project with the VBA Montgomery Regional Office and the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services to guide the development and design of collaborative business processes that could be implemented nationwide. (Near-Term)	x		
P-4.4	Negotiate a new Memorandum of Agreement with DOL to improve and standardize nationwide the DVOP-VR&E business processes and relationships for more effective and efficient delivery of services to veterans with disabilities seeking employment. (Mid-Term).		x	
P-4.5	Enter into proactive collaborative relationships with key local, regional, and national organizations such as the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs and state employment agencies and other entities such as the growing national employment network of state employment personnel, business representatives, and others. (Mid-Term)		x	
ORGANIZATION RECOMMENDATIONS				
O-1	Organizational, Program, and Fiscal Accountability			
O-1.1	Provide the VR&E Service Director greater line-of-sight authority over VR&E field staff and operations, resources and personnel evaluation, selection, assignment, and promotion. (Near-Term to Long-Term)	x	x	x
O-1.2	Establish clear lines of responsibility and authority within the VR&E Service for administration of the program and delivery of services. (Near-Term to Long-Term)	x	x	x

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O-1.3	Set formal performance goals for VR&E Officers, VR&E staff, Regional Office Directors, and Service Center Managers and hold these individuals accountable for performance. (Near-Term to Long-Term)	x	x	x
O-1.4	Implement a systematic project integration and change management process. (Near-Term to Long-Term)	x	x	x
O-1.5	Expedite transfer of voucher processing to RO Finance Offices; provide additional FTE as necessary to support this transition and workload. (Near-Term)	x		
O-1.6	Develop an integrated protocol for seamless management by VR&E and the CFO of voucher audit operations and establish performance standards to ensure timeliness of payments and purchases. (Near-Term)	x		
O-1.7	Implement a process and system for tracking and documenting the purchase of individual and cumulative Chapter 31 services and products purchased by RO staff for each veteran; put in place processes for analysis and executive oversight and review of nationwide data, trends in purchasing, and appropriateness of these purchases to the mission. Routinely provide visibility of this data and information to CO and field staff, RO Directors and the VBA CFO. (Near-Term to Mid-Term)	x	x	
O-1.8	Enforce a nationwide protocol for threshold approval (level of funds and types of purchases) of single and cumulative services and products procured by VR&E staff, VR&E Officers, and RO Directors. Develop this protocol in coordination with the CFO and Office of Field Operations to ensure that all aspects of fiscal control and program integrity are addressed. Provide RO Directors the authority to establish more restrictive fiscal controls based on local circumstances. (Near-Term)	x		
O-1.9	Enhance the functionality of CWINRS on a priority basis to address CFO requirements for internal control and financial management. Enhance the functionality of CWINRS for management and oversight of all discretely-procured contractor services and products by veteran, counselor and type of goods or services; establish cumulative expenditure thresholds for purchase of goods and services and establish a second level of pre-approval tied to these thresholds. (Near-Term to Mid-Term)	x	x	

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O-2	Central Office Organization and Facilities			
O-2.1	Implement a new organizational structure for the VR&E CO organized under four Assistant Director positions – Counseling and Outreach Programs, Employment Programs, Rehabilitation Programs, Field Operations. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
O-2.2	Create an Assistant for Program Integration position reporting to the Deputy Director. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
O-2.3	Enhance current CO capacities for: Management and Operational Analyses; Employment Services; Staff Training and Professional Education; Contract Management; Policy and Procedures; Quality Assurance; Finance and Resource Management; Information Technology; Administration of the Chapter 36 Program; Data and Program Coordination with DoD, DOL, and other federal agencies involved with veterans' small business and employment programs (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
O-2.4	Create new Central Office capacities for: Assistive Technology; Veteran Rehabilitation and Employment Research, Development and Planning; Program Analysis and Evaluation; Project Management; Field Operations; Disabled Transition Assistance Program (Mid-Term)		x	
O-2.5	Provide additional facilities for VR&E CO to improve productivity of current staff and for new staff. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
O-3	Central Office Staffing			
O-3.1	Increase the current direct staffing level of the VR&E Central Office staff from 33 to a goal of about 55-60 to more appropriately reflect the level of resources needed to execute the mission of the VR&E Service and support new and required capacities. (Near-Term to Mid-Term)	x	x	
O-3.2	Relocate the VR&E Central Office positions that were out-based at the Regional Offices back to Central Office to improve staff effectiveness. Consider consolidating the VR&E Quality Review Team at the C&P Star Team location. (Near-Term to Mid-Term)	x	x	
O-3.3	Provide contractor support services for VR&E CO. Contractor support services should be prioritized for management support; operational, process, and requirements analysis; project management and integration. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		

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O-4	Workforce Management			
O-4.1	Reevaluate and update the March 2003 VR&E Workforce and Succession Plan with concrete actions and milestones to mitigate the risks cited in the plan. (Mid-Term)		x	
O-4.2	Develop and implement workforce productivity and staffing analyses to develop a set of analytical tools for estimating future workload, task, and labor hour requirements, staff sizing, and skill mix. (See Recommendation on Program Analysis and Evaluation.) (Mid-Term to Long-Term)		x	x
O-4.3	Create Assistant VR&E Officer positions and a systematic and centrally-managed selection and training program for personnel to fill these positions. (Near-Term)	x		
O-4.4	Remove the freeze on hiring to fill all VR&E positions; change VBA policies so as not to constrain hiring for VR&E positions to local RO FTE ceilings. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
O-4.5	Provide VR&E with additional and temporary FTE positions to facilitate early hiring and training to mitigate the service impacts of anticipated personnel attrition. (Near-Term and Mid-Term)	x	x	
O-4.6	Create new staff positions and add staff for an Employment Readiness Specialist (56 FTE) and a Marketing and Placement Specialist (56 FTE) to facilitate implementation of the five-track employment service delivery system. (See System in Chapter 4.) (Near-Term to Long-Term)	x	x	x
O-4.7	Transfer VR&E's 45 FTE Employment Specialist staff positions back to counseling positions. (Near-Term to Long Term)	x	x	x
O-4.8	Create a new Independent Living Specialist position. (See Job Description in Appendix 12.) (Near-Term)	x		
O-4.9	Increase current field staffing levels to provide dedicated FTE to plan and implement VA's responsibilities in DTAP and execute a consistent, national DTAP program at all DoD installations and Military Treatment Facilities. (Mid-Term)		x	
O-4.10	Create and staff a new VR&E position at the RO for a contract/purchasing specialist and implement a training program for these staff in coordination with the VBA CFO and contract management staff. (See Recommendation on Workforce Management.) (Mid-Term)		x	

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O-4.11	Relocate the VR&E Central Office staff that was out-based at the Regional Offices back to Central Office to improve staff effectiveness. (See Recommendation on CO Staffing.) (Near-Term and Mid-Term)	x	x	
O-4.12	Consolidate the VR&E CO Quality Assurance (QA) staff and increase the size of the QA staff. (See Recommendation on Performance Measures and Quality Review.) (Near-Term)	x		
WORK PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS				
WP-1	Workload Management			
WP-1.1	Implement a VR&E Service CO process for visibility and management of the national VR&E workload to include an inventory management system and setting of consistent, nationwide priorities and strategies for workload management. (Near-Term to Mid-Term)	x	x	
WP-1.2	Streamline and standardize the scope and content for counselor case file documentation to include the use of the Needs Assessment Inventory. (Near-Term to Mid-Term)	x	x	
WP-1.3	Provide for electronic transcription capabilities to facilitate more efficient use of available counselor resources through voice activated software and/or the use of transcription services. (Near-Term)	x		
WP-1.4	Develop national and local RO forecasts of Chapter 31 veterans exiting rehabilitation and entering job ready status in FY 2004 (and beyond as necessary) and develop interim strategies and plans to more effectively manage this population of veterans until the Five Track Employment Process is fully implemented. (Near-Term)	x		
WP-1.5	Initiate a VR&E Service CO led nationwide project using contractors to follow-up with Chapter 31 veterans in interrupted or discontinued status and for tracking of veteran employment status. (Near-Term to Mid-Term)	x	x	

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WP-2 Contract Services				
WP-2.1	Continue to use contract services to supplement the VR&E workforce in providing counseling, employment, and rehabilitation services. (Near-Term to Long-Term)	x	x	x
WP-2.2	Revise the VBA Office of Field Operations resource allocation model to base RO funding for contract services on local estimates of the volume and types of services and the actual costs of services rather than the RO's percentage of the national workload. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
WP-2.3	Revise the current VR&E Services National Contract Statement of Work to provide definitions of the specific content of each service to be provided; standardize paper and electronic formats for submission of all contractor-developed evaluations, plans, case narratives, counseling or other requirements; establish a performance management and quality review process; and establish a VR&E contract service provider training and accreditation program. (Near-Term)	x		
WP-2.4	Develop a contract management training program for all VR&E Officers, supervisors, CO staff, and those VR&E field staff with direct responsibility for contract administration and supervision of contract services. (Near-Term)	x		
WP-2.5	Create and staff a new VR&E position at the RO for a contract/purchasing specialist and implement a training program for these staff in coordination with the VBA CFO and contract management staff. (Mid-Term)		x	
WP-3 Case Management and Specialization				
WP-3.1	Change the current VR&E case management model to a model based on specialization of work processes and the workforce. (Mid-Term)		x	
WP-3.2	Provide RO VR&E staffs maximum flexibility to specialize their staff resources. (Near-Term)	x		
WP-4 Priority Service at VHA				
WP-4.1	Implement a system within VHA and VBA to provide priority health care services to Chapter 31 program participants. (Near-Term)	x		

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		Near	Mid	Long
WP-5	Functional Capacity Evaluation (FCE)			
WP-5.1	Implement Functional Capacity Evaluation as a key process in a strategic redesign of the 21st Century Veteran Counseling, Employment, and Rehabilitation Program. (Long-Term)			x
WP-5.2	Design and implement pilot FCE projects as a first step toward implementation; consider co-locating this project office with the VBA C&P Exam Project at Nashville to leverage VBA resources program and technical capabilities. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
WP-6	Disability Transition Assistance Program (DTAP)			
WP-6.1	Assign primary responsibility for the planning and administration of VA's responsibilities in the DTAP program within VBA to the VR&E Service and designate a DTAP Manager. (Near-Term)	x		
WP-6.2	Set goals and measures of success to improve the administration of VA's responsibilities in TAP and DTAP. (Near-Term)	x		
WP-6.3	Develop standardized information briefings and materials to ensure service members are provided comprehensive counseling that is consistently delivered. (Mid-Term)		x	
WP-6.4	Establish a program with the DoD to deliver DTAP services at every Military Treatment Facility using VBA personnel or trained contractors. (Mid-Term to Long-Term)		x	x
WP-6.5	Provide dedicated funding to support the administration of DTAP. (Near-Term)	x		
INTEGRATING CAPACITY RECOMMENDATIONS				
IC-1	Regulations and Manuals			
IC-1.1	Work with General Counsel to publish updated Chapter 31 regulations consistent with the new Five-Track Employment Process and the integrated service delivery system within 9 months of the date of the VR&E Task Force Report. (Mid-Term)		x	
IC-1.2	Implement a change management process to control and integrate the various VR&E Service CO and field initiatives now underway to make changes in the process, regulations, manuals, policies, and technology functionality for administering the VR&E Program. (Near-Term to Mid-Term)	x	x	
IC-1.3	Impose communications discipline with the VR&E Service CO for timely response to field requests for guidance. (Near-Term)	x		

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IC-1.4	Update the VR&E Program baseline of regulations, manuals, and policies through an integrated change control process to be consistent with the new five-track service delivery system and the recommendations of the Task Force. (Mid-Term to Long-Term)		x	x
IC-2	Performance Measures			
IC-2.1	Design and implement a new VR&E process and outcomes performance measurement system for the five new VR&E service delivery tracks; base the outcomes performance measures on the concept of "Maximum Rehabilitation Gain;" coordinate with and use the expertise of the Department of Veterans Affairs Program Evaluation Service in the design, testing, and implementation of this new system; also seek the technical assistance of CARF in this effort. (Mid-Term)		x	
IC-2.2	Initiate a study of other federal, state, and private sector vocational rehabilitation service organizations to benchmark process and outcomes performance measures and quality assurance processes; coordinate with and use the expertise of the Department of Veterans Affairs Program Evaluation Service in this study and also seek the technical assistance of CARF in this effort. (Mid-Term)		x	
IC-2.3	Change the current methods used to measure VR&E claim timeliness so that the "timeliness clock" starts when the VR&E Division gets the Form 1900 application and a service-connected disability rating from the Veterans Service Center. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
IC-2.4	Reevaluate the rules for calculating the current timeliness measures for cases that are transferred to another RO. (Mid-Term; Priority)		x	
IC-2.5	Implement a new C&P performance measure for Veterans Service Center Memo Rating timeliness; incorporate this measure in the performance evaluation criteria for Service Center Managers. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
IC-2.6	Remove the number of discontinued cases from calculation of the VR&E rehabilitation rate (Near-Term; Priority)	x		

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IC-2.7	Do not count Independent Living cases in the current formula for computing the rehabilitation rate; create a new performance measurement system for IL. (Near-Term)	x		
IC-2.8	Change the final measurement of employment success from 60 days to 90 days, with case closure and follow-up at 120 days and 180 days by Central Office, RO, or Quality Review staff. (Mid-Term)		x	
IC-2.9	Implement a new VHA timeliness performance measure for Form 8861 requests from VR&E for services to Chapter 31 veterans. (Near-Term)	x		
IC-3	Quality Review Process			
IC-3.1	Redesign the Quality Assurance Review process to reflect the new five-track VR&E service delivery system. (Mid-Term to Long-Term)		x	x
IC-3.2	Seek technical assistance from CARF to facilitate improvements to the Quality Review process. (Near-Term)	x		
IC-3.3	Conduct an independent review in 6 months of the VR&E Quality Review Process now being implemented. (Mid-Term)		x	
IC-4	Information and Systems Technology			
IC-4.1	Remove the VBA policy constraints impacting VR&E productivity and service delivery to install T-1 lines for all VR&E out-based locations. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
IC-4.2	Hire a systems integration contractor to provide sustaining support to the VR&E Service for process and requirements analysis, technology assessments and recommendations, assistive technology consultation, and project management. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
IC-4.3	Elevate the VA funding priority of CWINRS, accelerate the development and production incorporation of financial and process enhancements, and expand the scope of the current Phase II CWINRS Functional Requirements Analysis. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
IC-4.4	Develop and conduct an initial and recurring training course on CWINRS report functionality and analysis for all VR&E field and Central Office staff. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		

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IC-4.5	Provide VR&E service contractors training on the use of CWINRS and access to CWINRS for data entry and reports. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
IC-4.6	Fully use CWINRS capabilities for Chapter 36; provide nationwide tracking of Chapter 36 participants and access to case information. (Near-Term)	x		
IC-4.7	Create a systems capability for VR&E to request and track VHA appointments and services for Chapter 31 veterans. This effort should be linked, establishing clear priority in VHA for Chapter 31 veterans who need services for timely employment readiness and to complete rehabilitation plans. (Near-Term; Priority)	x		
IC-4.8	Leverage IT capabilities to more efficiently administer Chapter 31 training and education programs and certifications and to track the progress of veterans in training and education programs. (Mid-Term)		x	
IC-4.9	Partner with the VA Learning University to develop a 21st Century online higher education program for Chapter 31 veterans and VR&E staff. (Long-Term)			x
IC-4.10	Initiate a long-term project to develop the functional requirements for a 21st Century VBA counseling, employment, and rehabilitation program information system capability. (Long-Term)			x
IC-5	Training			
IC-5.1	Establish a VR&E Training and Education Office to be located at the VR&E Central Office and provide dedicated staff. (Near-Term)	x		
IC-5.2	Accelerate the VR&E Training Needs Assessment planned for FY 2005 to begin in FY 2004. (Near-Term)	x		
IC-5.3	Develop and conduct formal initial training courses and a recurring training program with the VBA Training Academy using community as well as private sector and university-based experts and advocates in the field of disability, rehabilitation, and employment of persons with disabilities. (Near-Term)	x		

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IC-5.4	Create a program of professional continuing education and initiate a technical assistance relationship with the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities. (Near-Term to Mid-Term)	x	x	
IC-6	Resource Management			
IC-6.1	Develop an improved VR&E Resource Requirements Model. (Mid-Term to Long-Term)		x	x
IC-6.2	Modify the VR&E Resource Allocation Model to base contract funding on the forecasted estimate of the volume and types of services and the actual unit cost history for those services at each RO. (Mid-Term to Long-Term)		x	x
IC-6.3	Provide the VR&E Service Director some measure of control over the allocation of resources. (Near-Term)	x		
IC-6.4	Restrict the ability of RO Directors to redirect VR&E funds. (Near-Term)	x		
IC-7	Program Analysis and Evaluation (PA&E)			
IC-7.1	Defer the VA Program Evaluation of the VR&E Program scheduled for FY 2005; first invest in rebuilding the VR&E Service data and analysis (strategic and operational) capabilities. (Long-Term)			x
IC-7.2	Develop and fund a short and long-term research and study agenda focused on VR&E served veterans and program outcomes. (Long-Term)			x
IC-7.3	Develop and fund efforts to develop a set of evidenced based practices to guide development and implementation of VR&E policies, procedures, and policies. (Near-Term)	x		

