

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE READJUSTMENT OF VETERANS

February 08-10, 2022  
Virtual (WebEx Platform)  
1:00PM – 5:00PM (EST)

**MINUTES**

**Tuesday, February 08, 2022:**

**Attendees:**

**Committee Members Present:**

Verdie Bowen, Sr., Chair  
Erin Cook, MEd  
David Duren, PhD  
Michael Embrich, MA  
Terry Schow  
Thomas Hall, PhD  
Gregg Orto  
Jessica Dunn

**Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:**

Richard Barbato, Designated Federal Officer  
Matthew Newman, Planning & Policy Officer, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Barrett Phillips, Management & Program Analyst, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Andrew Tomacari, Management & Program Analyst, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Michael Fisher, Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Edward McEvoy, National Outreach Specialist, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Christopher Obrien, Director, Jacksonville, NC, Vet Center  
Elizabeth Sullivan, Fayetteville VA Medical Center, Fayetteville, NC  
Daniel Ducker, Fayetteville VA Medical Center, Fayetteville, NC

**Public Attendees:**

Joseph Leblanc, Veteran Service Officer, Town of North Andover, Massachusetts

**Opening Remarks:**

At 09:00 a.m., Designated Federal Officer Richard Barbato welcomed the Committee members, initiated with housekeeping items, to include the WebEx platform, and the process involved in navigating. He invited members of the public to introduce themselves for the record.

Members of the public introduced themselves.

Committee Chair Verdie Bowen, Sr. called the Committee to order, and provided an overview of the meeting, took roll call to establish quorum, introduced ideas for future meetings including one potential face-to-face session in November 2022 and two potential site visit locations to be determined.

**Presentation:**

DFO Barbato led the Committee in a review of the Committee Objectives and Charter. He also provided an overview of the Committee Report process moving forward.

**Presentation:**

Michael Fisher, Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling service presented to the committee on eligibility expansion. In addition, he discussed the impact of COVID and provided distinctions in service provision to ensure the safety of staff and those we serve and adaptations that have been made due to infection control. Discussed process of transition from outstation to full Vet Centers. Additionally discussed the application of the RCS Projection Model which was developed. He further explained its application to inform resource and staff allocations. He explained that there has been extensive analysis around capacity as part of that analysis. Next Mr. Fisher provided context around Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviews that had been completed and future planned surveys and recommendations. In addition, there was context provided around ongoing productivity analysis and relationship to addressing OIG recommendations. Finally, Mr. Fisher highlighted process improvements around patients that have been identified as at an elevated risk for suicide.

Questions from Committee members included:

Q: Verdie Bowen: GAO & OIG Results: (Requested copies of each report)

Q: Tom Hall: Customer Service: From Tom Hall, Results were shared from V-signals (customer service feedback).

**Presentation (Closed to the public for Veterans privacy):**

Jacksonville NC Vet Center – Tour Led by Vet Center Director Christopher OBrien

The Vet Center Director provide an overview of the Jacksonville NC Vet Center prior to the tour including performance data. Discussed increasing demand and visits. A virtual tour was provided of the facility.

Questions from Committee members included:

Q: Michael Embrich: Is there a map of existing state level resources?

**Presentation:**

RS Communications Office – National Outreach, Edward McEvoy.

The RCS National Outreach Specialist, Edward Mcevoy, provided an overview of Vet Center Outreach and described the system VOPs. He described the history of outreach within the National RCS System, including the current implementation of Mobile Vet Centers (MVCs).

Questions from Committee members included:

Q: Tom Hall: "Rumor that there is a hard stop 50 miles radius from Vet Centers".

Q: Tom Hall: "What Attorneys are available at Vet Centers?"

Q: Tom Hall: "Hope to hear what you are going to do when you open back up again", to clarify: "what's happening with in-person service".

Q: Michael Embrich: "Is RCS doing outreach into online video games and the metaverse?"

The committee then adjourned for a ten-minute break.

The committee re-convened after the ten-minute break.

**Presentation (Closed to the public for Veterans privacy):**

Fayetteville, NC VA Medical Center (VAMC) – Leadership Briefing

In Attendance from VAMC- Daniel Ducker, Elizabeth Sullivan

Briefing covered:

- I. Reviewed VAMC catchment area, locations, and market analysis
- II. Growth expectations, one of fastest growing VA's in the country
- III. Staffing and budget history
- IV. Review of behavioral health service line, offerings and locations of bh services
- V. Discussed future locations and expansion plans
- VI. Partners and collaborations with the Vet Center and local DOD locations

Questions from Committee members included:

Q: Gregg Orto: WOMACK Army Medical Center, Any Limitations for VA referral on consults? Example: If appt is cancelled how follow-up?

The committee then adjourned for a ten-minute break.

The committee re-convened after the ten-minute break.

Committee Chair Verdie Bowen re-capped the days presentations and covered what would be heard from the next day.

The Committee adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

**Wednesday, February 09, 2022:**

**Attendees:**

**Committee Members Present:**

Verdie Bowen, Sr., Chair  
Erin Cook, MEd  
David Duren, PhD  
Michael Embrich, MA  
Terry Schow  
Thomas Hall, PhD  
Gregg Orto  
Jessica Dunn

**Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:**

Richard Barbato, Designated Federal Officer  
Matthew Newman, Planning and Policy Officer, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Barrett Phillips, Management and Program Analyst, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Andrew Tomacari, Management & Program Analyst, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Christopher Obrien, Director, Jacksonville, NC, Vet Center  
Jelessa Burney, VA Advisory Committee Management Office  
Kshmendra Paul, VA National Center for Veteran Data Analytics and Statistics

**Public Attendees:**

None.

**Opening Remarks:**

At 1:00 p.m., Designated Federal Officer Richard Barbato welcomed the Committee members, initiated with housekeeping items, to include the WebEx platform, and other housekeeping items. He invited members of the public to introduce themselves for the record.

No members of the public introduced themselves.

Committee Chair Verdie Bowen, Sr. called the Committee to order, took roll call to establish quorum, and provided a re-cap of the previous day's presentations, as well as an overview of the meeting agenda for the day.

**Presentation: (Closed to the public for Veterans privacy)**

Jacksonville NC Vet Center – Key Staff Meeting

In attendance from the Jacksonville Vet Center were: Christopher O'Brien (Vet Center Director), Brian Cary, Kristin Love, Sherry Fox, Hunter Combas, Brian Noor, Gina Merced, Kaylynn Shepherd.

DFO Barbato handed over to the Vet Center Director to provide introductions and to initiate the question & answer session.

Vet Center Director Christopher Obrien facilitated introductions of his team.

Question & Answer Session then initiated- and included the following questions from committee members”

Q: Verdie Bowen: What do you offer outside of counseling services?

Q: Tom Hall: What happens when a counselor leaves the center?

Q: Terry Schow: How coordinate other types of benefits, like employment support?

Q: Verdie Bowen: Are you reviewing cases that potentially can be ungraded from dishonorable.

Q: Tom Hall: Are there opportunities for clinical rotations for students in the area?

Q: Gregg Orto: How do you get Veteran's support dogs?

Q: Mike Embrich: Does Vet Center have student debt relief for employees.

The committee then adjourned for a ten-minute break.

The committee re-convened after the ten-minute break.

**Presentation:**

VA National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics – Kshendra Paul

Mr. Paul provided an introduction and overview of the overall mission and capabilities of the VA Center for Data Analytics and Statistics. He further shared the organizational structure, services and offerings provided to the field. He further discussed records and data that are included under their services. Additionally, discussed data sources and how they are use statistics to project population information with the sources.

Questions from Committee members included:

Q: Terry Schow: What is the quality of survey data considering low response rates.

**Presentation:**

VA Veteran Experience Office – Amanda Tepfer

Ms. Tepfer provided an introduction and overview of the overall mission and capabilities of the Veteran Experience Office (VEO). She then reviewed the Veteran customer experience journey map and shared the Veteran perspective of 'One VA' and "moments that matter". Ms. Tepfer went on to review the composition and function of the offices within the Veteran experience Office. Ms. Tepfer reviewed the customer service "drivers' policies and laws. Ms. Tepfer finally reviewed the Military to VA transition project VEO is currently spearheading.

Questions from Committee members included:

Q: Verdie Bowen: Where did the sampling cited come from regarding the program?

Q: Verdie Bowen: Is there any future collaboration with the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs planned?

The committee then adjourned for a ten-minute break.

The committee re-convened after the ten-minute break.

Committee chair Verdie Bowen then lead the committee in a round-table discussion of the presentations the committee had received so far.

Committee Chair Verdie Bowen then reviewed the plan for the breakout sessions that would be used the next day.

The Committee adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

**Thursday, February 10, 2022:**

**Attendees:**

**Committee Members Present:**

Verdie Bowen, Sr., Chair  
Erin Cook, MEd  
David Duren, PhD  
Michael Embrich, MA  
Terry Schow  
Thomas Hall, PhD  
Jessica Dunn

**Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:**

Richard Barbato, Designated Federal Officer  
Matthew Newman, Planning and Policy Officer, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Andrew Tomacari, Management & Program Analyst, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Barrett Phillips, Management & Program Analyst, Readjustment Counseling Service

**Public Attendees:**

None.

Committee Chair Verdie Bowen initiated the meeting, took roll call to establish quorum facilitated a brainstorming session to determine the four to five topics the Committee would like to focus on for the next committee report. The table below represents the items for consideration:

**Presentation: (Closed to the public for Veterans privacy)**

Jacksonville, NC Vet Center – Veteran Panel

The Vet Center provided the Committee a chance to converse with a group of individuals who use Vet Center services: Representing the Global War on Terror, Vietnam as well as Blue and Gold Star family members. Each shared what brought them to the Vet Center as well as their experience there, and entertained questions from Committee members.

The committee then adjourned for a ten-minute break.

The committee re-convened after the ten-minute break.

**Committee Discussion:**

Committee DFO Richard Barbato and Committee Chair Verdie Bowen then reviewed the meeting concept for the remainder of the day, in crafting the 22<sup>nd</sup> Report. Committee Chair Verdie Bowen Broke the Committee up into working groups, Committee DFO Richard Barbato moved the committee members virtually into their assigned groups for the first block. During this breakout group discussion occurred in preparation of the FY22 Committee report and associated recommendations. Breakout groups focused on the following:

- Group 1 - Working on RSC space/facility.
- Group 2 – Access to RCS services.
- Group 3 – RSC Technology.

The committee then adjourned for a ten-minute break.

The committee re-convened after the ten-minute break.

Committee Chair Verdie Bowen Broke the Committee up into working groups, Committee DFO Richard Barbato moved the committee members virtually into their assigned groups for the second block in crafting the 22<sup>nd</sup> Committee Report.

Breakout groups focused on the following:

- Group 1 - Working on RSC space/facility.
- Group 2 – Access to RCS services.
- Group 3 – RSC Technology.

High level breakout occurred to discussion preparation of FY22 Committee report and associated recommendations,

Breakout sessions ended, and the Committee came together for final discussion:  
Breakout groups each presented their recommendations

The Committee then transitioned into recommendation refinement and fine tuning of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Committee report.

The committee finally discussed potential locations for their next meeting, as well as potential dates in which to meet.

The committee adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

  
Verdie Bowen, Committee Chair

4-11-22  
Date