



# Vets First Verification Program

## *Initial Application Reference Guide*

Help Desk: 1-866-584-2344

Email: [vip@va.gov](mailto:vip@va.gov)

Application Status Updates: [verificationfollowup@va.gov](mailto:verificationfollowup@va.gov)

Web: [www.va.gov/osdbu](http://www.va.gov/osdbu)

Revised: December 2016

**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization  
Center for Verification and Evaluation

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND .....	3
VERIFICATION OVERVIEW .....	4
PRE-QUALIFICATION .....	5
INTAKE.....	6
PRE-APPLICATION REVIEW.....	7
ASSESSMENT .....	8
DECISION .....	8
COMMON VERIFICATION SETBACKS.....	9
VERIFICATION RESOURCES .....	10

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This guide provides an overview of the Vets First Verification Program in order to better prepare Veteran small business owners for the application process.

### Vets First Verification Program

The Vets First Verification Program ensures that set-aside funds are awarded to legitimate firms owned and controlled by Veterans and Service-Connected Disabled Veterans. During Verification, the Center for Verification and Evaluation (CVE) verifies Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSBs) and Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (VOSBs) according to the tenets found in Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 74 that address Veteran eligibility, ownership, and control.

#### Eligibility

Eligibility is determined by the firm's ability to meet the small business requirements set by the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the owner's designation as a Veteran or Service-disabled Veteran in accordance with the definitions found in 38 CFR § 74.1. A Veteran is a person who served on active duty with the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard for any length of time, and was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable. A reservist or member of the National Guard called to federal active duty, or disabled from a disease or injury incurred or aggravated in the line of duty or while in training also qualifies as a Veteran. A Service-disabled Veteran is a Veteran who possesses either a disability rating letter issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) establishing a service-connected rating between 0 and 100 percent, or a disability determination from the Department of Defense (DoD).

#### Ownership

One or more Veterans or Service-disabled Veterans must directly and unconditionally own at least 51 percent of the business (38 CFR § 74.3).

#### Control

One or more Veterans or Service-disabled Veterans must demonstrate full control over the business operations (38 CFR § 74.4). Elements of control include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Day-to-day management
- Decision-making authority and strategic policy setting
- Managerial experience and the ability to exercise independent business judgement
- Full-time devotion
- Designation as the firm's highest officer and highest-compensated employee

Applicants must demonstrate compliance with all eligibility requirements outlined in 38 CFR Part 74 in order to be verified.

## VERIFICATION OVERVIEW

### Veterans First Contracting Program

The Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006 (Public Law (PL) 109–461) provides VA with unique authority for Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) and Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB) set-aside and sole source contracts.

PL 109–461 created a new hierarchy for open market procurements within VA which places highest priority with SDVOSBs, followed by VOSBs. These concerns are then followed by 8(a), HUBZone, Women-Owned Small Businesses, and next all other small businesses. This procurement authority, and its subsequent implementation, is a logical extension of VA’s mission to care for our nation’s Veterans.

VA refers to this program as the Veterans First Contracting Program, which expands contracting opportunities for SDVOSBs/VOSBs. Visit VA Acquisition Regulation Part 808: Required Sources of Supplies and Services for additional details regarding acquisition priorities.

### MyVA Verification Process

To qualify for participation in the Veterans First Contracting Program, eligible SDVOSBs/VOSBs must first be verified by CVE through the MyVA Verification Process. Only verified Veteran-owned companies are eligible to be publically listed in the VetBiz Vendor Information Pages (VIP) database.

The MyVA Verification Process includes:

- Pre-Qualification\*
- Intake
- Pre-Application Review
- Assessment
- Decision

\* This is an optional preparatory stage. Taking advantage of Pre-Qualification resources may significantly reduce processing time and ensure positive outcomes.

## PRE-QUALIFICATION

**Pre-Qualification** allows potential applicants to perform an eligibility self-assessment, become aware of available resources and assistance programs, learn about the requirements for Verification, and gather documents prior to submitting an application. Pre-Qualification *may* significantly reduce processing time and ensure positive outcomes.

The following steps are **required** before a Veteran business owner applies for Verification:

- Create an account in VetBiz VIP
- Register the business in the System for Award Management (SAM)
- Register the business with the state and/or county
  - Visit your state's Secretary of State website for specific state/county requirements
- Register the business with Dun & Bradstreet
- Gather, scan, and store electronic copies of all required documents
  - Access a list of required documents at Required Documents for VIP Application
  - Submit a detailed letter of explanation for documents that have not been included
  - Documents must be 5MB or smaller and submitted in Microsoft Word or PDF format

The following steps are **recommended** before a Veteran business owner applies for Verification:

- Review CVE Verification Assistance Briefs, Frequently Asked Questions, and Fact Sheets
- Participate in a CVE-hosted Pre-Application Webinar and Town Hall session

### Verification Assistance Counselors

Veteran business owners are *strongly encouraged* to connect with VA-certified Verification Assistance Counselors during Pre-Qualification.

VA-certified Verification Assistance Counselors are trained and certified by VA to provide Verification application assistance to SDVOSBs/VOSBs at **no cost** to Veterans. Counselors are available throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, and Guam and work with applicants to:

- Offer insight regarding Title 38 CFR Part 74
- Review a Veteran firm's business model
- Assist Veteran business owners with resource tools
- Review documents for application submission

## INTAKE

**Intake** begins once an applicant has created a profile in VetBiz VIP. A record is created in CVE's internal case management system, and the Veteran receives a welcome call from an Intake Analyst. During this phone call, the Intake Analyst explains the Verification process, provides instructions on next required steps, and answers any questions.

The Veteran business owner completes the VetBiz VIP profile by entering ownership information. To provide accurate ownership information, **all** owners of the applicant firm must sign VA Form 0877 and list the ownership percentage held by each owner. The total ownership percentage listed on the application must equal 99 to 100 percent. To be eligible for Verification, the ownership percentage **held by Veterans or Service-disabled Veterans** must be equal to or greater than 51 percent.

After VA Form 0877 is signed by all owners, the Veteran business owner uploads required business documents into the VIP profile. Only documents designated as "pre-application required documents" must be submitted initially, although applicants are welcomed to submit all required documents upfront. Any required documents not submitted initially will be requested later in the Verification application process.

Once all documents are uploaded and all profile information has been entered into the VIP profile, the Veteran selects the "Submit" button to submit the application to CVE and a confirmation message is displayed. At this point, the VIP profile is locked and cannot be edited while the application is in process unless permission is granted by CVE.

Once the application has been submitted, it is assigned to a Case Analyst, who will manage the application throughout Pre-Application Review and Assessment.

## PRE-APPLICATION REVIEW

During **Pre-Application Review**, the Case Analyst verifies the owner's Veteran status, conducts public research on the owner and business, and performs a cursory review of the applicant's pre-application documents. The Case Analyst also coordinates a date for a Pre-Application Review Interview with the Veteran business owner to provide an initial assessment of the applicant's likelihood of being verified.

If the Case Analyst identifies any potential areas of non-compliance, a Pre-Application Review Report is sent to the Veteran summarizing the issue(s) identified and providing an opportunity to address or correct the issue(s).

If no issues are identified during Pre-Application Review, the Case Analyst sends a request to the applicant for the remainder of the required documents. Once all required documents have been submitted, the application is considered complete and ready for Assessment.

During Pre-Application Review:

- VA Form 0877 is cross-referenced with the applicant's VetBiz VIP profile to ensure all information matches
- The VA Beneficiary Identification and Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS) database is used to validate the date of birth, Social Security Number, and Veteran status of each Veteran owner
- The Excluded Parties List System (EPLS) is used to verify all owners are in good standing with the federal government
- The Case Analyst ensures only six-digit NAICS Codes are listed on the Veteran's VIP profile
- The firm's Doing Business As (DBA) filing is reviewed to ensure that it has been properly registered
- Pre-Application Review documents are evaluated for accuracy and viability for examination. If any issues are identified, the applicant is provided an opportunity to address the issues
- If no eligibility issues are identified, CVE requests the remaining required documents
- Once all required documents are received, the application is ready for full Assessment

In some cases, Veteran status cannot be verified, and a letter is sent directing applicants to their local Veterans Benefits Administration office for resolution. Applicants may submit Form DD214 and/or a DoD-issued Determination of Service-Connected Disability to demonstrate Veteran status.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to reconcile BIRLS for eligibility issues. Visit VA BIRLS for additional information.

## ASSESSMENT

During **Assessment**, the Case Analyst performs a complete review of all documents and information submitted by the applicant. If further information or clarification is needed, the Case Analyst will send the applicant a clarifying document request.

If additional areas of non-compliance or ineligibility are identified, the applicant will have another opportunity to address these issues by participating in the Post-Review Findings Program. If the applicant is still unable to correct the remaining issues, the applicant will be given the option to withdraw the application or receive a denial letter.

Once Assessment is complete, the Case Analyst will make a recommendation to approve or deny the application. This recommendation is then forwarded to the Federal Review Team for final review and decision.

## DECISION

A federal employee reviews the work that has been done on the application and makes a final recommendation for approval or denial. This recommendation is sent to the appropriate CVE approval authority for a decision.

If approved, the CVE approval authority signs a decision letter, which is sent to the Veteran via email. This letter provides additional resources for Verified businesses and a link to the Verification logo. Once approved, the business is immediately listed in VetBiz VIP as a verified SDVOSB or VOSB. CVE's Verification of a SDVOSB and/or VOSB is valid for a period of two years.

VA-verified firms may display the trademark-protected SDVOSB or VOSB logo (sample images shown below). Use of the logo communicates the firm has undergone a comprehensive review to validate its status as an eligible Veteran-owned and controlled firm.





## COMMON VERIFICATION SETBACKS

Several common setbacks may negatively impact the processing time for Verification applications. The following are some common reasons for application processing delays:

- **Missing required documents.** It is critical that applicants submit **all** required documentation. If one or more required documents are missing, applicants must submit a letter of explanation detailing why the documents are not available.
  - For example, a complete tax filing should be submitted, including W2s and/or personal tax documents (as applicable). If an applicant has not yet filed taxes, a detailed letter of explanation and a copy of the extension request and approval must also be provided.
- **Applicant is not prepared.** Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the free advice of **VA-certified Verification Assistance Counselors** at the beginning of the process to ensure they are fully prepared, aware of available resources and assistance programs, and understand the requirements and expectations of the Verification process.
- **Discrepancies in ownership information.** When creating a profile in VetBiz VIP, it is important that the Veteran owner's name **matches the name on Form DD214** (including middle initial and suffix).
- **Delays in responding to document requests.** Monitor your email regularly throughout the application review process. If clarifying or supporting documents are requested, please respond to the request as soon as possible. The sooner the document request is completed, the sooner the Case Analyst can resume processing the application.
- **Contact information not up-to-date.** Maintaining current contact information in VetBiz VIP is essential to receiving up-to-date information and document requests.

**TIP:** Designate an additional account representative as a backup, in the event that the owner or manager of the profile is not available to respond to additional document requests.

## VERIFICATION RESOURCES

The following links provide quick access to information about the Vets First Verification Program and resources to help Veteran business owners prepare for the Verification application process.

**Vets First Verification Program** | [www.va.gov/osdbu/verification/index.asp](http://www.va.gov/osdbu/verification/index.asp)

**VA Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU)** | [www.va.gov/osdbu](http://www.va.gov/osdbu)

**VetBiz Vendor Information Pages (VIP)** | [www.vip.vetbiz.gov](http://www.vip.vetbiz.gov)

**CVE Pre-Application Webinar and Town Hall** | [www.va.gov/osdbu/verification/you\\_asked\\_we\\_listened.asp](http://www.va.gov/osdbu/verification/you_asked_we_listened.asp)

**CVE Verification Assistance Briefs** | [www.va.gov/osdbu/verification/assistance/briefs.asp](http://www.va.gov/osdbu/verification/assistance/briefs.asp)

**CVE Required Documents for VIP Application** | [www.vip.vetbiz.gov/Public/Register/DocumentList.aspx](http://www.vip.vetbiz.gov/Public/Register/DocumentList.aspx)

**VA Acquisition Regulation Part 808** | [www.va.gov/oal/library/vaar/vaar808.asp](http://www.va.gov/oal/library/vaar/vaar808.asp)

### **Verification Assistance Counselors**

[www.va.gov/osdbu/verification/assistance/counselors.asp](http://www.va.gov/osdbu/verification/assistance/counselors.asp)

**OSDBU Fact Sheets** | [www.va.gov/osdbu/library/factsheets.asp](http://www.va.gov/osdbu/library/factsheets.asp)

**OSDBU Frequently Asked Questions** | [www.va.gov/osdbu/faqs/](http://www.va.gov/osdbu/faqs/)

### **OSDBU Post-Review Findings Program**

[www.va.gov/OSDBU/docs/EVAL-T3-TEMPL-051-PRF-Email-Template-20160121-1.pdf](http://www.va.gov/OSDBU/docs/EVAL-T3-TEMPL-051-PRF-Email-Template-20160121-1.pdf)

**Public Law 109-461** | [www.va.gov/ogc/docs/PL109-461.pdf](http://www.va.gov/ogc/docs/PL109-461.pdf)

**System for Award Management (SAM)** | [www.federalcontractorregistry.com/](http://www.federalcontractorregistry.com/)

**38 CFR Part 74** | [www.va.gov/osdbu/docs/38cfr74.pdf](http://www.va.gov/osdbu/docs/38cfr74.pdf)

**Dun & Bradstreet** | [www.dnb.com](http://www.dnb.com)