



VETERANS' PROGRAM LETTER NO. 04-19

TO: ALL VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE STAFF
JOBS FOR VETERANS STATE GRANT RECIPIENTS

FROM: J. S. SHELLENBERGER
Deputy Assistant Secretary

SUBJECT: Guidance for Jobs for Veterans State Grant Annual Performance Incentive
Awards for State Employees and Employment Service Offices

I. **Purpose**

To provide guidance to states for planning, implementing, and reporting performance incentive award activities as established in Title 38, United States Code (38 U.S.C.), Section 4112 and amended by Public Law (P.L.) 109-461.

II. **References**

- (a) Title 38, U.S.C., Section 4112, as amended by P.L. 109-461 the *Veterans Benefits, Health Care and Informational Technology Act of 2006*, enacted December 22, 2006;
- (b) Title 38, U.S.C. Section 4102A(c)(7);
- (c) Veterans' Program Letter (VPL) [04-18](#);
- (d) Submission of Jobs for Veterans State Grants Interim-Modification Requests;
- (e) VPL 06-15, Corrected Copy Jobs for Veterans State Grant Annual Funding Modification Requests; and
- (f) VPL 01-15, Jobs for Veterans State Grants Recurring Reports.

III. **Rescission**

VPL 02-07, dated May 07, 2007, on the same subject.

IV. **Background**

Per Title 38, U.S.C. Section 4102A(c)(7), one percent of the Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) allocation states receive is designated for the purposes of performance incentive awards for eligible employees and employment service offices. The incentive awards program was established to: (a) encourage the improvement and modernization of employment, training, and placement services for veterans, and (b) recognize eligible employees and employment service offices for excellence in the provision of such services, or for having made demonstrable improvements in the provision of services to veterans.

V. **Eligibility and Selection Criteria**

Title 38, Section 4112 (d) as amended by P.L. 109-461 the *Veterans Benefits, Health Care and Informational Technology Act of 2006*, grants provide authority to recognize eligible employees or offices that provide exemplary employment services to veterans or to effect improvements and modernization of their veterans' employment service delivery methods.

a. **Eligibility**

Individual: Eligible recipients for individual incentive awards are Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists, Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff, and any other individual who provides employment, training, and placement services to veterans under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), include labor exchanges funded by the Wagner-Peyser Act or staff of American Job Center partner agencies. States are not restricted from awarding individuals who collectively serve a specific function or work in an area where their performance warrants recognition under a state's incentive awards program. Volunteers, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Work Study participants, and Federal employees are not eligible recipients.

Employment Service Offices: Public Law 109-461 Sec. 603 expands the recipient eligibility for performance incentive awards to include "employment service offices." Offices eligible to receive incentive awards include any service delivery point that provides exemplary public employment and training services to veterans; American Job Centers operated by State Workforce Agencies or offices that contract with State, Regional, or Local Workforce Development Boards; and other agencies identified in Section 121(b)(2)(B) of WIOA that provide services to veterans. Per Public Law 109-461 Sec. 603, incentive awards may be used by employment service office recipients for any purpose.

States are strongly encouraged to use discretion when deciding whether an award should be presented to an entire office rather than select individuals serving a common function within an office. Awards to offices should be reserved for instances where most, if not all, employees in an office contribute to improving employment or training services offered and provided to veterans.

b. **Selection**

In developing an incentive awards program, states are strongly encouraged to consider criteria that foster or strengthen partnerships at the state and local level. Selection criteria for award recipients must be based on performance or activities during the fiscal year for which the award is given. States are encouraged to include both objective and subjective data in developing selection criteria. In particular, states should consider employees and offices that demonstrate outstanding outreach on behalf of veterans who have barriers to employment, especially homeless, incarcerated, disabled, and recently separated veterans. States also may wish to consider individual or office-wide programs that promote employment opportunities

for veterans within the local community or enhance provider awareness of veterans' issues and resources. States are discouraged from relying solely on performance data, since such data will likely represent performance prior to the current fiscal year. Attitude, motivation, program improvement, positive feedback, and other indicators of outstanding performance should be given consideration in addition to numerical data.

For individual awards, particular emphasis should be placed on ensuring that all staff who serve veterans through the array of Department of Labor employment and training programs are considered for awards. States also should take extra care to recognize those individuals working in various specialized programs that serve certain target groups of veterans in each state. Attachment B provides sample criteria for nomination and selection of awardees.

Acceptable awards is defined broadly in order to accommodate the differences in state laws and union agreements. States with laws, policies, or agreements that restrict or prohibit recognition of individual staff with monetary awards or other certain types of incentives should avail themselves of the flexibility the law now provides to award offices or make non-monetary awards in combination with, or in lieu of, cash awards. States should develop an awards program in accordance with its governing laws, rules, and agreements, bearing in mind that the intent is to recognize individuals and offices with an award of personal or mutual benefit.

Items such as t-shirts, ball caps, plaques, certificates, or trophies are not eligible for the expenditure of a state's incentive. Examples of acceptable, non-monetary alternatives to cash awards are provided in Attachment C.

VI. **Planning and Reporting Requirements**

States are required to address plans for incentive awards programs and expenditure of such funds in their JVSG State Plan or the WIOA Combined State Plan (See Attachment A). The plan should include the objectives to be achieved through each state's incentive awards program, the planned selection and award process, and the means for disbursement. If substantive changes are subsequently made to the incentive awards program outlined in the approved State Plan, they must be explained in a modification request submitted to the Grant Officer Technical Representative (GOTR) in the state and approved by the Grant Officer.

States may submit a grant modification request with new or revised incentive award plans for the current fiscal year in the annual funding modification and/or an mid-year modification. All mid-year modification requests are due to the respective Director Veterans' Employment and Training (DVET) **no later than the second Friday in August** to ensure sufficient processing time prior to the close of the fiscal year. Regardless of when the revision is requested, the same obligation and liquidation dates apply.

NOTE: States that do not have an incentive award program and do not request incentive funds will be asked to provide the reasons why they are unable to utilize those funds in their

annual JVSG funding request.

States with approved incentive award plans must **obligate** incentive award funds by September 30th of each year and **liquidate** these obligations by December 31st of the same year. Any unspent incentive award funding will be deobligated during the grant close out of the applicable fiscal year. **No other use is allowable.**

States must provide an annual incentive award report in accordance with VPL 01-15 or the most updated policy guidance on this subject. The report will detail all incentive awards made to individuals and to offices by:

- a. Identifying all individual staff award recipients by name and title;
- b. Identifying all office recipients by office name, location, type of office (e.g., American Job Center, One-Stop partner, Employment Service office, WIOA partner agency, etc.); and
- c. Including a description and value of each award.

VII. **Actions Required**

- a. New or revised incentive award annual plans must be submitted with the JVSG State Plan, WIOA Combined State Plan, annual funding modification, or mid-year modification, as applicable.
- b. GOTRs will provide compliance assistance to states, upon request, regarding the process for seeking grant modification or regarding the incentive award process.

VIII. **Inquiries**

States may address questions to the appropriate GOTR.

IX. **Expiration Date**

To be reviewed for relevance on or before October 2020 and shall remain in effect until modified or rescinded.

X. **Attachments**

- A. State Plan Requirements for Performance Awards and Incentives
- B. Sample Criteria for Nomination and Selection of Awardees
- C. Sample Non-monetary Incentive Alternatives

Attachment A

State Plan Requirements for Performance Awards and Incentives

For States to be eligible to receive incentive funds in any fiscal year, the State Plan will:

- a. Indicate the total amount of funds designated for performance incentive awards;

Criteria: To be considered acceptable, the narrative must designate no more than one percent of the initial grant allocation for use as performance incentive awards.

- b. Address the objectives to be achieved through the state's incentive awards program;

Criteria: To be considered acceptable, the narrative must describe how the state's incentive award program will encourage individuals and/or offices to achieve excellence in the provision of services to veterans and/or to demonstrate improvements to the system for the delivery of such services.

- c. Describe the planned selection and award process;

Criteria: To be considered acceptable, the state's narrative must describe how award recipients will be selected, identify the general criteria to be considered, and describe how the award process will be inclusive of the full spectrum of Department of Labor employment and training-related programs and non-Federal partners.

- d. Describe the planned disbursement of incentive award funds;

Criteria: To be considered acceptable, the state's narrative must identify the entity within the state that will administer funds and identify cash and/or non-cash award items representing the total amount of designated funding. (Example: \$5,000 to be distributed as 10 \$500 cash awards, OR \$5,000 to be distributed as 10 items of merchandise, etc.) If cash awards are not utilized, the narrative should explain the rationale.

Attachment B

Sample Criteria for Nomination and Selection of Awardees

Selection Criteria:

In designing an incentive awards program, the guiding principle is that chosen criteria recognize and promote the improvement of employment services to veterans. The following is a partial list of sample criteria for achievements or efforts that states may wish to promote and reward:

- a. Development of a program for which the impact may not be directly measurable (e.g., a resume skill building program)
- b. Promotion of entry into federal employment
- c. Promotion of Hire Veterans Medallion Program
- d. Outstanding case management
- e. Exemplary Job Fair Support
- f. Vocational rehabilitation marketing; direct marketing to employers-Note: This is an example of how awards criteria may foster partnerships, since vocational rehabilitation specialist often work with or rely upon assistance from DVOP or LVER staff.
- g. Exceptional performance beyond job requirements or outside of established performance goals
- h. Ideas that are implemented to improve the system, improve performance, reduce time or cost, or to promote collaboration
- i. Performance measures-Note: If used, must reflect the given performance period
- j. Outreach/community-relations efforts, e.g., Chambers of Commerce, employers, etc.
- k. Generation of positive publicity for a local office; increase awareness of relevant issues within the employer community
- l. Enhancement of on the job training, customized job training, or compensated work therapy
- m. Efforts to assist hard-to-place populations (homeless veterans, etc.)
- n. Collaborative success in providing all services to veterans; may include success in employer relations and “great customer service” to veteran clients.
- o. Other pre-defined achievements or measures

Attachment C

Sample Non-monetary Incentive Alternatives

The following is a partial list of non-monetary incentives that states may consider. Awards also may be given in cash/non-cash combinations. These examples are to assist states in developing the most appropriate format for their incentive awards program. States have the responsibility to work with their pertinent organizations and legal entities, ethic boards, etc. in selecting final award options.

- a. Trip to Washington, DC with families and/or trip to the Annual Veterans Salute, personal presentation by Assistant Secretary of Veterans' Employment and Training Service
- b. Travel and accommodations to a Professional Conference
- c. Dinner or lunch with State Administrator or State Director
- d. Recognition at statewide JVSG conference
- e. Training/Academic/Conference/Seminar Scholarship - (e.g. management training, postgraduate study, certification, course of choice)-Note: Intent must be to benefit the individual recipient; such award must be above and beyond training typically provided.
- f. Membership dues (Better Business Bureau, professional associations, etc.)
- g. Merchandise (stereo, TV, software, furnishings)-Note: Awarded "bonus points" could be redeemable from a "menu" of merchandise.
- h. Personal services (e.g. coffee, bottled water delivery, fruits/flowers of the month, health club membership, cell phone services, etc.)
- i. Gift Certificates (e.g. restaurants, bed and breakfast, stores)
- j. Tickets to performing arts, sports, or other events
- k. Weekend getaway package
- l. Travel expenses for conferences, award ceremonies, training, etc.
- m. Paid parking
- n. Recipient's choice of non-cash award options

Note: Inquiries have been made regarding whether incentive awards may be items that will enhance office or individual job performance, such as software or training. Awards are intended to be of personal or corporate benefit to recipients. Bearing this intent in mind, there may be some cases where specialized training or performance-enhancing software not ordinarily purchased by state programs may be an approved use of incentive award funds, if it is clearly of personal benefit to the recipients.