



January 4, 2006

ASVET MEMORANDUM NO. 01-06

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL VETS STAFF

FROM:   
CHARLES S. (CHICK) CICCOLELLASUBJECT: Policy and Guidance for FY 2006 - FY 2008

Thank you for your support during and since my confirmation as Assistant Secretary. Words cannot express how fortunate I feel, and how honored I am, to have served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Veterans' Employment and Training Service from 2001 to 2005, and now as the Assistant Secretary.

This letter spells out my policy and guidance for the coming years. You will recall nearly four years ago, we published the first "Policy and Guidance" letter to provide the direction for our agency. That was a difficult period for VETS because a number of things were distracting us from our important work. You may remember that the first thing we did was to ask everyone to focus totally on our mission and our people.

We also established and published our priorities and we included a "Ten Most Wanted" list of actions. These actions became goals for 1) *improving relationships with States*; 2) *better management of our grants* and 3) *enhancing employment opportunities for veterans*. The reason for the "Ten Most Wanted" was to provide a means by which we and others could measure and report on our progress.

As a result, we have made great progress in these four years. Today, VETS is a high performing Federal Agency that is very well attuned and responsive to the employment needs of veterans. For a small agency, we do a lot. Our programs are highly successful, and they are a good model for "budget-performance integration." Our leadership session in 2004 highlighted that VETS was an organization with a common cause and that we were totally focused on serving the employment needs of veterans. In sum, this is an agency that looks forward, and the future is bright for VETS.



At the same time, our continued success will be determined by:

- 1) how well we continue to integrate our programs in America's workforce system;
- 2) the quality of employment services provided to veterans by the LVERs and DVOPs, as well as One Stop Career Center staff;
- 3) our commitment to improving our programs for protecting service members employment/reemployment rights, and to improving employment assistance for transitioning service members including National Guard and Reservists; and
- 4) how well we respond to the employment needs of our seriously wounded and injured service members, veterans with barriers to employment, and homeless veterans.

### **Purpose**

This letter outlines the policy and guidance that will direct our efforts and continue our success for the next four years.

### **Continue to Focus on our Mission and our People**

One thing I have learned over the years is that we get more of what we focus on. Four years ago, we identified that our focus should be on our mission and our people. We have benefited greatly from that both as an Agency and as individuals. Our success in achieving and surpassing our performance goals bears that out.

In setting the guidance and policy for the next several years, I ask that we all re-commit ourselves to the foundation we have established; that we rededicate ourselves to our mission and our people; and that we focus on what we want this Agency to look like in the future. To review the purpose of our mission and people focus:

Our *mission focus* should always be on helping veterans get good jobs, protecting their employment rights, and helping separating service members make a smooth transition into the workforce. Our duty is to stay totally engaged in those activities that contribute directly to the employment of veterans and transitioning service members. Things that do not directly or indirectly contribute to these missions should be looked at skeptically.

Our *people focus* should be on investing in staff training, development, and individual performance. When you look at what works best in VETS, it is our people. They have a common cause, they're mission-focused, and they have a total commitment to their work. VETS' internal and external relationships are

good, our technical knowledge is unsurpassed, we know who the customer is, and we are tuned in to the employment needs of veterans. In sum, our people are empowered.

Now it is time to take this organization to the next level by building on our strengths and developing the future leaders who will replace us.

### **Creating the future for the Veterans' Employment and Training Service**

The best way to predict the future for this organization is for us to create the future we want. That is why, when I accepted the nomination to become the Assistant Secretary, I laid out three goals for this Agency. From these general goals, I have developed specific outcome goals.

#### **Goals for the Next Three Years**

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of employment services to veterans in the One Stop Career Center system. We need to continue to build upon the success of the JVA implementation. We are currently placing 6 of 10 veterans in employment. **Our specific outcome goals by FY 2008 are:**
  - 1) to help ETA fully implement the "Key to Career Success" Initiative;
  - 2) to help States develop competency standards for DVOPs and LVERs; and
  - 3) to show continuous improvement in the placement of veterans into good jobs through the workforce system so that every veteran who wants to work is employed in a good job leading to a good career.
  
- Improve transition assistance services for active duty, Reserve and National Guard service members who are moving from the military to civilian life, and ensure all service members and veterans understand their employment and reemployment rights. **Our specific outcome goals by FY 2008 are:**
  - 1) to complete a review of the TAP program of instruction and implement needed changes;
  - 2) to achieve an 80% to 90% participation rate (instead of 60%) in the TAP employment workshop for all transitioning service members;
  - 3) to make available a TAP module for every returning National Guard or Reserve service member;
  - 4) to ensure that each TAP employment workshop participant leaves the workshop with a resume and a pocket guide explaining employment services for veterans; and

- 5) to achieve continuing reductions in USERRA and Veterans Preference meritorious cases resulting from VETS' compliance assistance, education, and outreach efforts.
- Focus intensive employment services and personal, face to face assistance on those service members and veterans who need our help the most – those who are recently separated, those who have been seriously wounded or injured, those with significant barriers to employment, including homeless veterans. **Our specific outcome goals by FY 2008 are:**
    - 1) to firmly establish REALifelines as a national program for disabled/wounded/injured veterans.
    - 2) to provide REALifelines access at all major military and Veterans Affairs medical treatment facilities.

### **Priorities.**

From these goals I have established the following priorities:

- 1) Improve entered employment outcomes, retention and earnings for veterans.
- 2) Improve transition services for active duty, reserve and National Guard.
- 3) Improve relationships with State Workforce Agencies.
- 4) Improve leadership training for VETS' staff.

### **THE NEW "TEN MOST WANTED" LIST OF ACTIONS**

In 2002, we established a "Ten Most Wanted List" of actions, by which we could help guide the accomplishment of our mission and goals, and by which VETS could report progress and gauge our success. The "Ten Most Wanted" responded directly to the long-standing criticisms of VETS having no vision, poor program performance, lack of accountability, and poor oversight of grant programs. This worked well. By focusing on the Ten Most Wanted, we improved transparency, collaboration with partner organizations and stakeholders, grants management and performance accountability.

Accordingly, for FY 2006 – FY 2008, here are the "TEN MOST WANTED" actions.

1. Extend flexibility to States to operate the Jobs for Veterans Act Grant Program. We have significantly improved grants management, reduced some of the onerous reporting and eliminated many overly prescriptive practices. As a result, veterans are today receiving greater access to the full range of One Stop

Career Center services. To continue this trend and to improve veterans' priority in the One Stop Career Centers, it is essential that states be able to provide the particular services veteran clients need. The flexibility we provide to the State Workforce Agencies to operate the DVOP and LVER grant program is essential to improving service delivery and employment outcomes. We must continue to emphasize our role as a partner to the state workforce agencies.

2. Work with the States to better integrate the DVOP/LVER program in the Workforce System. This is our biggest challenge for the future. It requires more effective relationships between VETS Federal Staff and the State Workforce Agencies. We must help states improve DVOP/LVER selection, training and accountability. With the implementation of the Department of Labor's "Key to Career Success" initiative and the increased focus on better integration of DVOP and LVER services in the One Stop Career Centers, we will see better employment performance outcomes for veterans.

3. Make our outreach and collaboration with our stakeholders more effective. We have been pretty successful in improving veteran employment outcomes in the One Stop Career Centers with nearly 6 in 10 veterans entering employment. The homeless veteran and incarcerated veterans programs are producing significant outcomes. We are succeeding with the REALifelines program because of the high quality of our person to person, face to face assistance to seriously wounded and injured service members from the Global War on Terror. TAP employment workshops have improved, the number of workshops has increased, and TAP is now provided to service members who separate overseas. More service members know about their employment/reemployment rights because VETS and ESGR brief them before and after they deploy. The quality of USERRA investigations is up and the number of investigations is down. Veterans' preference is better understood, although we have a long way to go on this one (that is why we are aggressively pursuing outreach to Federal Agencies on the use of special appointing authorities for certain veterans). More DVOPs and LVERs are helping place the VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment participants in employment.

But the truth is that none of this has occurred without the collaboration of the Department's Employment and Training Administration and Office of Disability Employment Policy, the House and Senate Veteran Affairs Committees, the National Association of State Workforce Agencies, the State Departments of Labor and State Workforce Agencies, the State Departments of Veterans Affairs, the Veteran Service Organizations, the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs (especially VR&E), Homeland Security, Justice and the Office of the Special Counsel. If we are to continue to maximize employment

opportunities for veterans, VETS must leverage support from, and always be an enthusiastic and reliable partner with, our stakeholders.

4. Increase TAP participation. This will require collaboration and coordination at national and local level with DOD, the Services, and at individual military installations to ensure as many active duty service members as possible enroll in the TAP employment workshop. At the same time, we must expand the opportunity for modified TAP employment workshops so that returning Reserve Component and National Guard service members may participate. This requires a continuous effort to coordinate and collaborate with the RC/NG commanders and with the One Stop Career Centers.

5. Make TAP more relevant. Further improving the transition assistance employment workshops for Active Duty, Reserve and National Guard service members will require some adjustments in the program of instruction and a review of TAP is currently underway. Beyond these curriculum changes, there are some very specific improvements we must implement. For example, each service member should leave the TAP workshop with a resume, an employment "pocket guide," knowledge of the "Hire Vets First" campaign web site, and the location and names of the veteran employment representatives at the local One Stop Career Center nearest his/her post-service location. We must also begin looking at how we can connect more employers to TAP. For example, TAP facilitators and employers need to provide job information and job vacancies to the TAP participants during the workshops. It seems to me that many of these improvements can be made almost immediately.

6. Continue Enforcing USERRA and Veterans Preference Rights. With the publication of the new USERRA Regulations and the aggressive focus by OPM and DOL on Veterans Preference, VETS must continue the campaign to ensure all service members and veterans understand their employment/reemployment rights and entitlements.

7. Improve the Quality of Intensive Services and Case Management for those who need it most. To help States focus intensive employment services and personal, face to face assistance for those service members who are recently separated, those who have been seriously wounded or injured, and those with barriers to employment, the REALifelines program provides a very useful model, and it must be firmly established as a national program.

8. Institutionalize the "Hire Vets First" Campaign. After three years of this successful national campaign, it is now time to "power down" the "Hire VETS First" Campaign to state level in order to help employers know where they can find veterans. This must become a high priority activity by Regional

Administrators. By driving employers to the One Stop Career System to find veterans, they will become actively involved in making the veteran employment connection. This will link the employer outreach responsibility of the LVERs with the national focus from the campaign.

9. Invest in VETS' staff. Specifically, I want to look for more leadership development and training opportunities for our career professional staff.

10. Transform our business practices into regular operations. We have made the first steps by linking our VETS strategic plan with the Departmental goals. The reporting through the VPMRS needs to provide agency management with decision information. Grant and budget cycles need to be predictable and linked to field reporting.

### **Additional Guidance - What to focus on and What NOT to focus on**

#### **This is what to Focus on:**

- Leadership
- Mission
- Goals
- Getting veterans good jobs
- Rewarding good work and results
- Promoting Priority of Service
- Flexibility
- State assessments
- Solving our own problems
- Identifying solutions
- Simplifying reporting
- Doing things on time
- Succeeding and creating momentum
- Identifying our peoples' strengths
- Leadership training for our staff
- Creating value in all our work

If we focus on these things, we get more of these things. We move forward because we know who we are, what we're doing and where we're going. We trust each other and we empower our people.

#### **This is what NOT to focus on:**

- Managing by micro-managing
- Why we need more processes
- Why we need more meetings
- Why we need more reporting and more metrics

Responding to why we are late  
Why our budget is too small  
Why we are failing  
Why we need a new state assessment tool  
Identifying people's weaknesses  
Poor performance  
Catering to egos  
Making decisions to please someone  
Being a slave to e-mail and our desks

If we focus on these things, we will get more of these things and we will be moving backwards.

### **Successful Integration of the DVOP and LVER Grants Programs in the One Stop Career Centers.**

I am sometimes asked how the DVOP and LVER programs should be more effectively integrated in the Workforce System. There is always confusion over this subject. Many states and many of us are struggling with this issue. Some think integration of the DVOP/LVER program means the demise for the program because they think the DVOPs and LVERs would have to serve all One Stop clients and veterans would receive no priority. Others believe the DVOP/LVER program should be "siloed" off and that only DVOPs and LVERs can properly serve veterans. Both views are about going backwards and both views ignore that our program must operate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workforce system.

This is how I see the DVOP and LVER program successfully integrated into the One Stop Career Centers and working well.

1. Services to veterans are valued in the One Stop. They are not separated or "siloed." DVOPs and LVERs know how to do job development. They love their jobs and get great satisfaction from their work with veterans. They know the programs well and they do not just sit around and do nothing. They realize they must give their best every day - that is what veterans need, and that is the expectation.
2. LVERs focus on employer outreach and on referral networking because they know the industries and the jobs in their areas. They "broker" jobs with employers. LVERs see the employers as the major customer of the One Stop. They know all the DOL-funded job training and job placement programs available to veterans in the One Stop.
3. Performance standards exist for all state staff and reflect services to veterans. Services to veterans are valued. There is not an

overemphasis on “triage” services for veterans or for other clients and no one is treated like a number. By the same token, job ready veterans are moved along quickly to either “self service” or to the available employment or training opportunities. DVOPs focus case management on employment.

4. Performance plans are in place for every LVER and DVOP, and States constantly review LVER and DVOP performance.
5. LVERs are always ensuring that all One Stop partners are aware of Priority of Service. The LVER also ensures that the DVOPs are aware of and are utilizing the resources of the other One-Stop partners in servicing their veteran clients.
6. Written policies exist for both the “Key to Career Success” Initiative and the JVA Priority of Service to veterans.
7. States budget for their veterans conferences each year. The conferences are attended by all partners. DVOPs and LVERs receive training at the conferences.
8. DVOPs and LVERs partner with the WIA providers and the ES staff. There is a synergy and a sense of unity and partnership that develops and they all function as a team.
9. State of the art technology is in place in the One Stops. The equipment comes with training and has the right software.
10. DVETs confirm State self assessments and conduct effective on site State Assessments in real time and in accordance with VETS national office guidance.
11. DVETs have access to the same performance data base information as others in the State Workforce Agency and the DVET is on the same level as the State Veteran Employment Representative. Relationships are open and honest and problems and questions are dealt with. Communication is excellent. DVETs are not seen as “micro-managers.”
12. DVETs work closely with States and NVTI to ensure veteran employment services training for DVOPs and LVERs and that sufficient LVERs are certified TAP facilitators.

## Summary

I hope and trust the guidance in this letter is helpful as you go about your day to day duties. I ask that you follow this policy and guidance, keeping in mind that if we want VETS to continue to serve veterans well, to continue to be a high performing organization, and to continue to grow, it will require all our best efforts, and it will also require some changes.

If you believe, as I do, that these changes will result in better services to veterans, then in order to get there, we must BE the change that we want. That takes a lot of things, including determination, flexibility and courage. But that is what leadership is all about and that is why I have prepared this letter. You can be sure that I will be there every step of the way with you.

I have had the opportunity to meet and visit with most everyone in VETS. I admire and respect the work you do each day, your dedication to veterans, and your sense of mission. Because of what you are doing each day, I see VETS as an Agency with a future that gets better every day.

Thank you for your service to veterans and to America.