



Year in Review 2014

Multnomah County Veterans Task Force

Year in Review - 2014

Background

There are 44, 985 veterans who reside in Multnomah County, more than any other county in the State of Oregon. This diverse group represents service men and women from four different generations who bring a variety of assets, needs, and perspectives to this community.

In April, 2010, the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners passed Resolution No. 2010-037 to establish the Veterans Task Force. This advisory group was charged with assessing and identifying the services provided by Multnomah County to veterans, and providing recommendations for improving these services. Chaired by Commissioner Diane McKeel, the Task Force is comprised of representatives from various county departments and select community groups and organizations with expertise in the levels and types of assistance provided to veterans.

The Task Force meets monthly to discuss county policies, present information on delivery of services, and explore any strategies to overcome barriers faced by military families.

Veterans Task Force Workplan

With the diversity of needs among veterans in this community, ranging from service men and women returning from deployment to the aging population of World War II and Korean War veterans, the Task Force workplan focuses on multiple issues impacting veterans.

This workplan is based on the Multnomah County Community Covenant with Veterans and Military Families. The Community Covenant is a community-based solution to bridge the gap between rising needs among veterans and their families, and an expected contraction of state and federal support for veterans following deployment.

The Community Covenant was developed by a steering committee convened by Commissioner McKeel in 2013. This committee of nearly thirty members met monthly over a period of seven months to develop the commitment statement and series of action plans to serve as a road map for the community to be engaged. This covenant and related action plans were endorsed by the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners as well as the Sheriff, District Attorney, and Mayors of the Cities of Gresham, Fairview, Portland, Troutdale, and Wood Village.

The Veterans Task Force continues this work by discussing obstacles identified in the Community Covenant and strengthening networks to leverage additional resources to achieve the indicators of success defined by the steering committee.

In developing the workplan for 2014, the Veterans Task Force selected a different issue from the Community Covenant to be the focus of each month's meeting. These issues included: Accessing Benefits, Criminal Justice, Education, Employment, Families, Health Care, Housing, Mental Health & Addiction, Suicide Prevention, and Women's Services.

Accomplishments

- Advocated for additional resources for County Veterans Service Officers.

In the FY15 budget the Multnomah County Board approved funding for the Veterans Services Expansion that increased office funding by \$235,375 for an additional 2.67 FTE employees, including a new County Veterans Service Officer, a Program Supervisor, and a half-time Office Assistant.

Multnomah County Veterans Services Office received a outreach grant from Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs for \$74,877.17. This funding supported outreach efforts to increase community education programs, expand geographic reach to new veterans in the county, advertising about available services and benefits, and additional administrative support. The Veterans Service Office presented the outreach plan to the Veterans Task Force and utilized its feedback and network to support the implementation.

- Legislative briefing and updates on proposed legislation in the State of Oregon and federally, with discussion on how these would impact services and veterans in Multnomah County.
- Created partnership to develop resource guide for school to enhance support for children in military families. Currently engaged with Multnomah Education School District to design proposal for schools in Multnomah County.
- Coordinated efforts and outreach for two separate Veterans Stand Down events in Multnomah County.
- Increased awareness of services provided to veterans. Specific presentations included:
 - Cover Oregon and how veterans can access health insurance through open enrollment.
 - Mental health services provided through Oregon National Guard.
 - Panel discussion on women's veterans services, including how they are identified, services through the Portland VA Medical Center and Community Resource and Referral Center, and additional resources available through the Multnomah County Health Clinics and Mental Health and Addiction Services programs.

- Role of Family Assistance Program through the Oregon National Guard, and available resources for military connected children and youth.
- Lines for Life Military Helpline services, and the partnership with Portland Police Bureau.
- Multnomah County Guardianship Program services and referral process.
- Development and implementation of the Multnomah County Veterans Docket and Justice Outreach Project.
- County Innovation Network resource database through the National Association of Counties. Upon Task Force's direction, model legislation from Oregon was posted relating to in-state college tuition rates for veterans and translating licensure and certification from military to civilian professions.
- Overview of Joint Transition Assistance Program (JTAP) and primary needs reported by National Guard families.
- Operation 424 partnership to end veteran homelessness. Presentation included overview of the scope of chronic homelessness among veterans in Multnomah County, federal housing programs for veterans (HUD-VASH, SSVF, Grants and Per Diem, and Shelter + Care), and outreach efforts to build relationships with landlords.
- VA services for veterans from OEF/OIF/OND conflicts. Presentation offered information on this program for veterans in the Portland service area, along with a veteran who shared his personal story of deployment and subsequent reintegration following an injury in combat.
- Introduction to the Multnomah County equity and empowerment lens, and discussion about application to veterans in order to better utilize opportunities for engagement.
- Information on events, regional Veterans Stand Downs, job fairs, and service-related workshops.

Focus Areas for 2015

The Veterans Task Force will continue to meet on a monthly basis and follow the schedule for Community Covenant focus areas. Over the next year, the Task Force has identified several priority items to focus on:

- Promote employment opportunities for veterans.
Through their service and training, many veterans develop valuable transferrable skills, teamwork and work ethic that makes them strong candidates for employers. In addition, there are services and incentives available to employers who hire veterans, such as training, salary support, and tax credits. The task force has identified employment as a priority issue for next year. Potential projects for further discussion include:
 - Identify referral resources and services available to employers. Promote educational outreach across the county and state through partnership with Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) and Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA).
 - Develop a speakers' bureau for Task Force members to present to rotary clubs and business associations, with short summary documentation for consistent and accurate messaging.
 - Support the SERVe study to enhance retention of employees who are veterans.
 - Support coordinated mentor opportunities to assist veterans in building resumes, following up on job searches, and retain employment.

- Stabilize Stand Downs in Portland and East County.
Advocate for sustainable funding and coordination of Stand Down events in Portland and East County.

- Support military families with school-age children.
Coordinate resources and strengthen partnerships with schools to better identify children from military families and improve their access to resources. Opportunities may include

developing method of identifying military connected children, training or improved networking between schools and service partners, or advocating for a session for parents with a child in school to be added to pre- and post-deployment activities (e.g. Yellow Ribbon events, pre-mobilization town halls).

2015 Meeting Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Focus Area</u>
January 5 th	Health Care
February 2 nd	Mental Health and Addictions, state legislation
March 2 nd	Women's Services
April 6 th	Families
May 4 th	Suicide Prevention
June 1 st	Criminal Justice
July 6 th	To be determined
August 3 rd	Education
September 14 th	Employment
October 5 th	Accessing Benefits
November 2 nd	Housing
December 7 th	Year in Review

