

BEFORE THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF COWLITZ COUNTY, WASHINGTON

In the Matter of Rescinding Res. No. 18-113)
And adopting Policy and Procedures Manual)
For the Administration of the Veterans Relief)

RESOLUTION NO. 19-066

WHEREAS, the Cowlitz County Commissioners believe an efficient and effective system to provide relief for indigent Veterans and their dependents is of primary importance.

WHEREAS, this policy is established according to the articles set forth hereafter, and as provided by the laws of the State of Washington pertaining to Veterans.

IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED that Resolution No. 18-113 be rescinding and the enclosed Policies and Procedures Manual for the Administration of the Veterans Relief Fund of Cowlitz County is hereby adopted.

EFFECTIVE this 25th day of June 2019.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF
COWLITZ COUNTY, WASHINGTON



Joe Gardner
Joe Gardner, Chairman

absent-excused
Dennis P. Weber, Commissioner

Arne Mortensen
Arne Mortensen, Commissioner

ATTEST:

Tiffany Ostreim
Tiffany Ostreim,
Clerk of the Board

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

FOR ADMINISTRATION OF THE

VETERANS' RELIEF FUND

OF

COWLITZ COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Approved by Board of Cowlitz County Commissioners

Date: 6-25-19 Res. No. 19-066

**POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
FOR ADMINISTRATION OF THE VETERANS' RELIEF FUND
OF COWLITZ COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

POLICY

The Board of Cowlitz County Commissioners will support local veterans, their families, and any nationally-recognized Veterans' service organization in Cowlitz County, Washington.

PROCEDURES

A. Advisory Board

Under the Revised Code of the State of Washington (RCW) 73.08.35, the Veterans' Advisory Board (VAB) shall be appointed by the Board of County Commissioners.

1) Selection of qualified board members

No fewer than a majority of the board members shall be members from a nationally recognized veterans' service organizations and only veterans are eligible to serve as board members.

2) Duties of advisory board

Advise the Board of County Commissioners the needs of local indigent veterans, the resources available to local indigent veterans, and programs that could benefit the needs of local indigent veterans and their families. The advisory board will work with the County Veterans' Relief Coordinator to review the current assistance program when necessary.

B. VRF Screening Officers

1) Selection of qualified Veteran's organizations

The Board of County Commissioners will appoint qualified organizations to provide trained Veterans' Relief Fund (VRF) Screening Officers. Expectations for appointed organizations will be set forth in a written agreement/contract between the County and the qualified organization.

2) Screening Officers

Screening Officers will be appointed by the selected agency or agencies to review and submit applications for assistance to the County Veterans' Relief Coordinator. Each agency will maintain an up-to-date list of VRF approving and screening officers, and will provide this list to the County on a regular basis.

3) Initial Point of Contact

The initial point of contact for an applicant shall be from the Veterans' organization in Cowlitz County with which the Veteran is affiliated. Organizations shall maintain regular hours of operation in order to assist the Veteran in his/her application for assistance. All applications for assistance must be forwarded to the Screening Officers for review and approval.

C. VETERAN ELIGIBILITY

Under the Revised Code of the State of Washington (RCW), Veterans, their families (definition as outlined in RCW 73.08.005), and the families of deceased indigent veterans, i.e., widow(er)s and/or dependent children during the first eighteen (18) months after the death of an eligible veteran, are eligible for emergency assistance. Using the RCW as the guideline, the following are established as "Criteria for Assistance:"

1) **Veteran defined**

An eligible Veteran shall conform to the definition set out in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 41.04.005 and 41.04.007, as now enacted or as may hereinafter be amended.

2) **Proof of Veteran Status**

A Veteran must be able to show proof of his/her status as a Veteran. Veteran must show an original or certified copy of a DD-214 OR, if discharged prior to 1950, a Certificate of Discharge OR a Medical Card or a VA Claim ID Card. A photocopy of such form(s) shall be submitted with the application for relief assistance. Photo identification is also required for verification at the time of application.

Discharge documentation must show Honorable Service (RCW 41.04.007).

Therefore, only Veterans with an Honorable or General (under Honorable conditions) discharge are eligible for assistance.

Documents other than discharge certificates which give service dates and character of service may be accepted in lieu of proper discharge papers ONLY when they are issued by a recognized agency, i.e., Veterans Administration, a Washington Department of Veteran Affairs Contract Service Office, etc. These documents are acceptable on a temporary basis only and must be on letterhead stationery from the issuing agency. Screening Officers should verify the authenticity of such documents.

The applicant shall be told that assistance is on a temporary basis only and that further assistance will require proper discharge documentation and that only one request for assistance can be accepted in any one-month period with the exception of food requests which can only be accepted once in any three-month period.

A copy of all discharge documentation shall be included with the application for assistance.

3) **Residency Requirements**

The Veteran must have been a continuous resident of the State of Washington for a period of one year immediately prior to the time of application, and a resident of Cowlitz County for at least ninety (90) days at the time of application. Assistance will not be provided until the applicant can adequately document residency.

Residency may be documented by showing that a Veteran has established a bona fide domicile (home) in Cowlitz County. The following factors may be considered in determining residency, but are not limited to, showing:

- a. Ownership or occupancy in a permanent home in Cowlitz County; or
- b. Ownership of real property in Cowlitz County; or

- c. A valid Washington State Driver's License with a Cowlitz County address; or
- d. A valid Washington State Identification Card (issued by Dept. of Licensing); or
- e. A current bank account with a Cowlitz County address; or
- f. A current Cowlitz County Voter Registration Card; or
- g. A vehicle currently registered in Cowlitz County.

A Veteran shall not be disqualified, on the basis of non-residency, for temporarily living outside Cowlitz County for the purpose of seeking or maintaining employment or for an absence due to circumstances or conditions beyond the control of the Veteran, if the Veteran's intent is to maintain ties to Cowlitz County and to continue to reside permanently or indefinitely in Cowlitz County.

County residency may be waived if extraordinary circumstances exist and are documented with the application.

4) Identification

Veteran must be able to provide proof of identification and documentation of eligibility of dependents.

It is not the intent of the County to make it difficult for an applicant to receive assistance. However, it is essential that proper identification be submitted by the applicant to ensure that the person being assisted is indeed the person whose name appears on the discharge document or other documents that satisfy burden of proof.

5) Veteran must be indigent

- ~~a. Indigent means a person without resources. For purposed of determining indigent status, a Veteran may claim exemptions for real property and one motor vehicle. The amount of the allowable exemption shall be the same as the amount allowed for personal exemptions for homestead/real property and for motor vehicles under the Federal Bankruptcy statutes (Title II U.S.C. Section 522), as now enacted, or hereinafter amended.~~
- ~~b. While it is difficult to put an exact dollar figure on an amount that would determine if an individual is indigent, the County shall utilize the needs standards set forth by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. This guide is updated annually and determines need based upon income and poverty levels. The County will provide a copy of the schedule within sixty (60) days of publication by the United States Department of Administrative Services to contracted Veteran's organization(s).~~
- ~~c. Need standard is the minimum monthly gross income required to meet basic needs. This income increases as the size of the household increases. Determining if a family meets the need standard shall be accomplished by using the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) poverty guidelines at 150 percent of the Federal poverty level for the 48 contiguous States and the District of Columbia to include the veteran and the persons in the family or household. If the resulting amount is equal to or less than the need standard, the Veteran is considered eligible for Veterans' Relief Fund assistance.~~

- a. Indigent means a person who is defined as follows:
- i. The Veteran and/or a person in the family or household is receiving one of the following types of public assistance: Temporary assistance for needy families, ages, blind, or disabled assistance benefits, pregnant women assistance benefits, poverty-related veterans' benefits, food stamps or food stamp benefits transferred electronically, refugee resettlement benefits, Medicaid, medical care services, or supplemental security income;
 - ii. The Veterans household receiving an annual income, after taxes, of up to one hundred fifty (150) percent or less of the current federally established poverty level.
 - iii. Persons in the family or household refers to spouse, state registered domestic partner (as defined by RCW 26.60.025 and RCW 26.60.030) and/or children living with or being supported by the veteran.
- b. Indigence is not determined solely by financial resources. An applicant may have a source of income and still be considered indigent on an emergency basis. However, persons with more than the minimal income generally may receive assistance on a one-time basis only. One-time basis is defined as once with a 12 month period of time. The twelve (12) month period begins on the date the applicant receives assistance.
- c. Lack of funds because of bad management of an adequate source of income does NOT make the applicant indigent.

6) Case Management

When a veteran household has received five hundred dollars (\$500.00) of assistance during a 12-month period, the veteran will be required to create a plan for self-sufficiency and make progress toward goals outlined in their plan before receiving additional assistance. VRF Screening Officers will refer the veteran for case management. The Veterans' Relief Fund is intended for emergency relief only.

7) Final Determination

When in doubt, final determination of eligibility, identification, and compliance with requirements is the responsibility of the County. All exceptions will be discussed and approved by the County prior to submission of applications or payment of assistance.

D. DISBURSING FUNDS

1) General Information

Assistance to qualified applicants is reviewed by the contracted Veteran's organization(s) and provided by Cowlitz County, primarily in the form of direct relief through the use of warrants or an imprest account set up specifically for Veterans' Relief Fund payments.

It is recognized and understood that there may be situations when a Veteran or his/her dependent may require support or help to make application for assistance, such as when a Veteran or his/her dependent is emotionally distraught or medically incapacitated to such a degree that they are unable to function independently. It is the desire of the parties that these situations not prevent a Veteran or his/her dependent from receiving assistance and, to that end, the parties agree that the Veteran or his/her dependent may act by and through an agent. For purposes of this

policy, "agent" shall mean a member of the nationally recognized Veterans' organization(s) in Cowlitz County with an agreement to provide trained Veterans' Relief Fund (VRF) Screening Officers and who has been appointed upon written request of the Veteran or his/her dependent. The agent shall be authorized to act on behalf of the Veteran or his/her dependent to:

- a. Complete, sign and deliver the relief application to the County Veterans' Relief Coordinator, including required and supporting documentation; or
- b. Receive payments made to or on behalf of a Veteran or his/her dependent in accordance with this policy, for such assistance as may be approved. The agent must file with the County an affidavit accounting for the use of the funds.

Assistance to a Veteran or Veteran's widow or widower and dependents shall not exceed twelve hundred dollars (\$1,200) in any 12 consecutive-month period. In the event of Veteran's death, the survivor's income shall be calculated from date of the Veteran's death. Documentation verifying this must be provided at the time of application.

Only one request for assistance can be accepted in any one-month period, with the exception of food requests. Notwithstanding the foregoing aggregate limitation, certain types of assistance shall have specific limitations. Monetary limits on all types of assistance are detailed in the section with that heading. All warrants issued are classified into one of the following categories:

Food Assistance	Rent Assistance
Utility Assistance	Medical Assistance and Counseling Services
Death Benefit	Natural Disaster Assistance
Miscellaneous	

Expenses in excess of the approved amount are the responsibility of the applicant.

2) Food Assistance

The Veterans Fund is intended for emergency use and requests for frequent assistance should be reviewed carefully and the applicant reminded of the emergency nature of the fund.

Food assistance may be approved once within a three-month period up to the amount of one hundred fifty dollars (\$150.00) for a Veteran who does not support a family. Applicants may choose to request a seventy five dollar (\$75.00) check twice within a three-month period and must be at least 30 days apart.

Veteran's supporting a family may be approved once within a two-month period up to the amount of one hundred fifty dollars (\$150.00). Proof may be requested to show Veteran supports a family.

3) Rent Assistance

This is used to assist a Veteran to remain in a domicile or to provide temporary shelter to get a Veteran off the streets. Rental assistance may be restricted to a portion of rent due depending upon the resources available to the veteran and shall not exceed seven hundred dollars (\$700.00) usually given only once a year.

However, this will be determined on an individual basis and the circumstances surrounding the situation will be carefully considered. To receive rent assistance, an applicant must provide proof of residency in the dwelling indicated. The only document that will be accepted is a written (preprinted) rental agreement. Rent will generally not be paid to relatives of the applicant. An eviction or late notice from the landlord is required.

- a. Rent assistance depends heavily upon the circumstances of the applicant and will be provided after an interview conducted by the Screening Officers. Rental assistance requests will be thoroughly investigated.
- b. Use of rent funds for rent deposits is not allowed. Rental assistance may be restricted to one-half of rent due, and will not exceed seven hundred dollars (\$700.00). Checks or warrants issued for rental assistance will be made payable directly to the landlord.

4) Housing Assistance

Housing assistance is used to assist a Veteran with the cost associated with obtaining new housing. A letter is required from the landlord stating they are willing to accept payment from the County by mail. Assistance is available once every 3 years and shall not exceed nine hundred dollars (\$900.00). Assistance will not be counted towards the 12 month maximum. To receive housing assistance, an applicant must provide proof in the form of a written (preprinted) rental agreement and letter signed by the landlord. Housing assistance will generally not be paid to relatives of the applicant. The total approved amount of assistance may include moving expenses. Disbursements will only be made directly to landlords and/or vendors.

5) Utility Assistance

- a. Assistance may be provided for electricity, water, bottled gas (propane), fuel oil and firewood. Utility assistance is limited to a maximum of four hundred (\$400.00) per year (commencing upon the date of the first payment). Although ordinary payment is a one-time payment, Screening Officers may recommend additional payments provided the amount does not exceed the yearly maximum. Utility assistance for bottled gas, fuel oil and firewood will be provided only on an extreme emergency basis during the months of May through August, thus ensuring an adequate amount of funds are available for the colder winter months. Assistance for electricity or water service require that a Veteran has received a late notice or a 72-hour shut-off notice. It is the responsibility of the nationally recognized Veterans' organization(s) to maintain a liaison with the utility companies to assure that the amount of assistance is adequate to prevent a shut-off. It is considered expedient to assist only when it will prevent termination of service.
- b. Use of utility funds to pay for utility deposits is not allowed.

6) Medical Assistance and Counseling Services

- a. Medical assistance may be granted to help qualified applicants with the purchase of prescription medication authorized by a licensed physician. Assistance may be granted up to 3 times per year for up to one hundred fifty

dollars (\$150.00) not to exceed four hundred fifty dollars (\$450) in a year. If the Veterans' organization determines the request to be emergent and unable to wait for County payment process, they will provide funding and request reimbursement subject to County approval. All checks or warrants issued for prescription medication will be issued payable to a licensed pharmacy.

- b. Funds may also be granted, to the extent funds are available, to (1) contract with professional counseling specialists to provide evaluations and direct treatment to war-affected veterans and to national guards men and women and reservists; and (2) provide services to those same persons affected by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), particularly for those veterans whose PTSD has intensified and who are unable to obtain timely treatment or diagnosis from the Department of Veterans' Affairs Medical facilities. Such assistance shall not exceed three hundred fifty dollars (\$350.00) in twelve (12) consecutive months.
- c. Use of medical assistance to pay for overdue medical /dental expenses is generally not permissible.
- d. Use of medical assistance to pay for eyeglasses, dental work or dentures is generally not permissible.
 - i. Once every three (3) years up to three hundred dollars (\$300) for eye exam and/or eye glasses only, with the exception of repairs which are approved on a case by case basis.
 - ii. Exceptions for emergency dental work or dentures must be approved by the Screening Officers. Screening Officers need to be aware that other agencies provide assistance in this category and should ensure applicant has attempted assistance through these agencies.

7) Death Benefit

- a. In accordance with RCW 73.08.070, as now enacted or hereinafter amended, it shall be the duty of the legislative authority of Cowlitz County to designate a proper authority to be responsible, at the expense of the County, for the burial or cremation of any deceased family member of an indigent Veteran who dies without leaving means sufficient to defray funeral expenses. The costs of such burial or cremation may not exceed the limit established by the County legislative authority nor be less than three hundred dollars (\$300.00) PROVIDED, HOWEVER, that such internment shall not cost more than the limit established by the County legislative authority not less than three hundred dollars (\$300.00). If the deceased has relatives or friends who desire to conduct the burial of such deceased person, then upon request of said Commander or Relief Committee, a sum not to exceed the limit established by the County legislative authority not less than three hundred dollars (\$300.00) shall be paid directly to the respective funeral home by the County Auditor or designee by the County legislative authority upon due proof of the death and burial of any person provided for by this section and proof of expenses incurred.
- b. The Cowlitz County Legislative Authority hereby sets the burial benefit limit at one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00) which amounts shall be reviewed bi-annually, at which time the limit may be increased or remain the same as determined by the County Legislative Authority.

8) Natural Disaster Assistance

Eligible Veterans who have suffered damage or loss as a result of a natural or catastrophic disaster may receive assistance in the form of a warrant up to five hundred dollars (\$500.00) for Veteran without regard to other entitlements that may already have been paid from the fund. Further, payment of this entitlement will not affect any benefits that may be payable in the future.

Natural or Catastrophic Disaster is defined as an act of God, including, but not limited to hurricanes, tornadoes, wind storms, ice storms, earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, fire, and mud slides. Vehicular accidents as a result of icy, or snow covered roads, are not included, or covered under this type of assistance.

Payments of natural disaster assistance are granted only when necessary for the health or well-being of the Veteran or their family. In all cases, the fund will be "last" payer. In no case may entitlements be used to pay for services, materials, or goods that are reimbursable under an applicant's insurance policies or state or federal disaster relief aid.

9) Miscellaneous

Other assistance may be provided if reasonably necessary. Miscellaneous assistance will be limited to five hundred dollars (\$500.00) per year.

- a. Assistance for clothing may be provided if a qualified applicant is required to obtain uniforms or specialized clothing or footwear to secure employment.
- b. School supplies and/or tuition may be allowable based on Veteran's individual need. Checks or warrants issued for school supplies and/or tuition will be made payable directly to the school. Tuition must either be paid or documentation provided of tuition being paid by the federal government prior to payment of school supplies.
- c. Emergency car repair for the purpose of transportation to work or school. Veteran must submit three (3) written estimates from reputable auto repair shops. Checks or warrants issued for emergency car repair will be made payable directly to the auto repair shop with the lowest bid.
- d. Other assistance may be provided if reasonably necessary and approved by:
 - i. A majority of the members of the Cowlitz County Board of Commissioners, or
 - ii. The Cowlitz County Veterans Relief Coordinator and a majority of the members of the Screening Committee.

10) Method of Payment

The Cowlitz County Health & Human Services staff will process Post rent and other non-emergency payments through the voucher system established by the Cowlitz County Auditor.

E. APPEAL FOR FUNDS

Any request for assistance that an applicant feels was not acted upon properly by the Screening Officers may be appealed in writing to the Veterans' Advisory Board within fifteen (15) days. The Board of Cowlitz County Commissioners shall make a final

determination after review by the Veterans' Advisory Board. Appeals shall be made in writing, include all documentation, and be mailed to: Cowlitz County Veterans' Relief, Health & Human Services, 1952 9th Avenue, Longview, WA 98632.

F. VETERANS' FACILITY EXPENSES

1) Nationally-chartered Veterans Organizations

RCW 73.04.080 authorizes rent to be paid to nationally-chartered Veteran organizations, provided:

- a. Said organization does not own, nor is purchasing property for which organization rent is being paid;
- b. The amount to be paid will be a reasonable amount approved by the County Legislative Authority in any one year;
- c. Said organization is not renting from another organization of the same national Veteran organization, i.e., Post rent cannot be paid to a VFW Post renting from a VFW Hall, or an American Legion Post renting from another American Legion Post, etc.

2) Veterans' Service Center

Upon approval of the Board of Cowlitz County Commissioners, funds from the Veterans' Relief Fund may be made available to pay facility expenses for the Veterans' Service Center.

G. POST RELIEF FUNDS

If a Cowlitz County Veterans' Organization provides relief funds to a needy Veteran from their own organization's Relief Fund, they shall not receive reimbursement from the Cowlitz County Veterans' Relief Fund.