

Effective Date: 02/04/2020

7500

POLICY

(FINAL)

Public Health Standard(s): 10.2

Approved by: *Carole Harrison*

Cancels:

See Also: RCW 26.60.025, 26.60.030, 41.04.005, 41.04.007, 73.04.080, 73.08

POL – VETERANS RELIEF FUND

This policy is intended to set forth the policies and procedures for administration of the Cowlitz County Veteran’s Relief Fund (VRF) as allowed by the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) Chapter 73.08 and as overseen by Cowlitz County Health & Human Services (CCHHS).

This policy establishes guidelines for the following:

1. The Cowlitz County Veteran’s Advisory Board
2. Cowlitz County VRF Screening Officers
3. Veteran eligibility for Cowlitz County VRF assistance
4. Disbursement of funds by CCHHS
5. Appeal processes
6. Rent assistance to qualified Veteran’s organizations

Failure to comply with this policy may lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

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Cowlitz County Health and Human Services

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VETERANS RELIEF FUND (VRF) POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

(REVISED)

Effective 10:00 am Wednesday, February 4, 2026

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

I-1 Purpose

The Board of Cowlitz County Commissioners (BoCC) supports local veterans, their families, and nationally-recognized Veterans' service organizations in Cowlitz County, Washington.

Under the Revised Code of the State of Washington (RCW) 73.08.010, for the relief of indigent veterans, their families, and the families of deceased indigent veterans, the legislative authority of each county shall establish a veterans' assistance program to address the needs of local indigent veterans and their families.

The county legislative authority shall consult with and solicit recommendations from the veterans' advisory board established under RCW 73.08.035 to determine the appropriate services needed for local indigent veterans. Veterans' assistance programs shall be funded, at least in part, by the veterans' assistance fund created under the authority of RCW 73.08.080.

Cowlitz County created this assistance program for Veterans using the RCW as guidelines for these policies and procedures. These guidelines are designed to:

- Establish procedures to support 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 18 months after the death of an eligible veteran, are eligible for emergency assistance.
- Ensure that the expenditures are viable and operational and is compliant with all guidance documents.

I-2 Applicability and Scope

- The provisions of this document apply to the Cowlitz County Health and Human Services Departments (CCHHS) and any veterans' service organization appointed by the County to serve as a point of contact for the program.
- A copy of this guide shall be maintained on the department's website at www.cowlitz.wa.us/hhs. This manual and all referenced materials will be used by CCHHS and appointed veteran's service organizations to manage the county's Veterans' Relief Funds.

I-3 References

- U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines (<https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>)
- RCW 26.60.025; RCW 26.60.030; 41.04.005; 41.04.007; 73.04.080; 73.08.005; 73.08.010; 73.08.035; 73.08.080

SECTION II: ADVISORY BOARD

II-1 Selection of Qualified Board Members

Under the Revised Code of the State of Washington (RCW) 73.08.035, the Veterans' Advisory Board (VAB) shall be appointed by the County using the following guidelines:

- No less than a majority of the board members shall be members of a nationally recognized veterans' service organization.
- Only veterans are eligible to serve as board members.

II-2 Duties of the Advisory Board

The duties of the Advisory Board is based on the following:

- Advise the Board of County Commissioner the needs of local indigent veterans, the resources available to local indigent veterans, and programs that could benefit the needs of local veterans and their families.
- Work with the County Veterans' Relief Coordinator to review the current assistance program as necessary.

SECTION III: VRF Screening Officers

III-1 Selection of qualified Veteran's organizations

The County 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.

III-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.

III-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.

SECTION IV: ELIGIBILITY

IV-1 Definitions

- Veteran

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.

- Indigent means a person who is defined as follows:
 - 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;

- The Veterans household, including all dependents, is receiving an annual income, after taxes, of up to 150% or less of the current federally established poverty level as indicated in Appendix A of this policy.
- 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 dependent children living with or being supported by the veteran.
- 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, applicants with more than the minimal income generally may receive assistance on a one-time basis only. One-time basis is defined as once within 12 consecutive months. The 12-month period begins on the date the applicant assistance is issued.
- Lack of funds because of bad management of an adequate source of income does NOT make the applicant indigent.
- Family
 - Means the spouse or domestic partner, surviving spouse, surviving domestic partner, and dependent children of a living or deceased veteran, or a service member who was killed in the line of duty regardless of the number of days served.
- Dependent
 - Child
 - The child must be unmarried **and** meet one of the following:
 - Under 18 years old; or
 - Between the ages of 18 and 23 years old **and** enrolled in school full time; or
 - Permanently disabled before they turn 18
 - Parent
 - The parent must be biological, adoptive, or foster parent of the Veteran.
- Caregiver
 - Must be at least 18 years old **and**:
 - A spouse, child, parent, stepfamily member, or extended family member of the Veteran; **or**
 - Someone who lives full-time with the Veteran.

IV-2 General Information

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

Families of a deceased indigent veterans, i.e., widow and/or dependent children during the first 18 months after the death of an eligible veterans, may be eligible for assistance.

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 caregiver or 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:

- Complete, sign and deliver the relief application to the County Veterans' Relief Coordinator, including required supporting documentation; or
- Receive and distribute food vouchers made to a Veteran in accordance with this policy.

IV-3 Application Submission

Applications must be completed through a qualified contracted Veterans' organization. The Veterans' organization will pre-screen the application to ensure the application meets eligibility and funding usage requirements.

If the application does not meet the requirements of the program, the application should be denied by the organization. If an exception to program eligibility is being requested, the organization needs to provide additional information and/or documentation for the County to make a final determination.

Applications may be submitted by email, fax, or paper. All applications must be received by the County by 10:00 am each Wednesday with payments placed in the mail and vouchers delivered the following Thursday after 8:30 am. Holiday and business closures are subject to change these deadlines and the County will notify the organizations in writing of the changes.

If applications submitted by 10:00 am have missing or incomplete information, the County will notify the organization and will allow until close of business (4:30 pm) on Wednesday for the organization to submit the missing information. If the missing information is not submitted by close of business Wednesday, the application will be held over to the following week. If the missing information is not provided the following week by 10:00 am Wednesday, the application will be denied.

When a veteran household has received \$1,500.00 in multiple applications of assistance during a 12-month period, and it appears to the Veteran Relief Coordinator that the veteran is in need of and would benefit from financial management training, the veteran may be required to attend financial management training. Certification that the veteran has completed the training will be a requirement for any future VRF applications. The veteran will be given the opportunity to respond to the requirement for any future VRF applications. The veteran will be given the opportunity to respond to the requirement by submitting a written response within ten days of being notified of the requirement. The Veterans' Relief Fund is intended for emergency relief only.

IV-4 Proof of Veteran Status

A Veteran must be able to show proof of his/her status as a Veteran. Acceptable proof may be one of the following:

- An original or certified copy of a DD-214, or
- If discharged prior to 1950, a Certificate of Discharge, or
- A Veterans' Medical Card, or
- A VA Claim ID Card, or
- A driver's license with a veteran designation

A photocopy of such form(s) shall be submitted with the application for relief assistance.

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.

IV-5 Identification

Veteran must be able to provide proof of identification and documentation of eligibility of dependents. Photo identification is required for verification at the time of application.

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.

IV-6 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 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:

- Ownership or occupancy in a permanent home in Cowlitz County; or
- Ownership of real property in Cowlitz County; or
- A valid Washington State Driver's License with a Cowlitz County address; or
- A valid Washington State Identification Card (issued by Dept. of Licensing); or
- A current bank account with a Cowlitz County address; or
- A current Cowlitz County Voter Registration Card; or
- 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.

IV-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.

SECTION V: USE OF FUNDS

V-1 General Information

Assistance to a Veteran or Veteran's widow or widower and dependents shall not exceed \$2,400.00 within 12 consecutive months. 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 assistance issued are classified into one of the following categories:

Food Assistance	Rent Assistance
Utility Assistance	Medical Assistance and Counseling Services
School Supplies and Tuition	Miscellaneous
Housing Assistance	Burial/Cremation Expense
Natural Disaster Assistance	

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

V-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 as follows:

- Once within a two-month period up to the amount of \$350.00 for a Veteran who does **not** support a family; or
- Veteran's supporting a family may be approved once within a two-month period up to the amount of \$500.00, plus an additional \$150.00 per child Proof may be requested to show Veteran supports a family; and
- Applicants may request to split food assistance into two equal amounts for the two month period.

V-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 \$2,000.00 within 12 consecutive months. However, this will be determined on an individual basis and the circumstances surrounding the situation will be carefully considered.

Use of rent funds for rent deposits is not allowed.. Checks issued for rental assistance will be made payable directly to the landlord. Rent will generally not be paid to relatives of the applicant. Mortgage payments may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

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.

Rent Assistance documentation must include, but not limited to:

- Provide a written (preprinted) rental agreement signed by the applicant and the landlord.

AND

- An eviction or late notice from the landlord is required.

V-4 Utility Assistance

Assistance may be provided for electricity, water, bottled gas (propane), fuel oil, pellets and firewood. Utility assistance is limited to a maximum of \$1,000.00 within 12 consecutive months. Utility assistance for bottled gas, fuel oil, pellets, 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. 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. Use of utility funds to pay for utility deposits is not allowed.

Utility Assistance documentation must include, but not limited to:

- A late notice or a 72-hour shut-off notice.

V-5 Medical Assistance and Counseling Services Assistance

Use of medical assistance to pay for overdue medical /dental expenses is generally not permissible.

Medical assistance may be granted to help qualified applicants for the following:

- Prescription medication prescribed by a licensed physician.
Assistance may be granted up to four times per year for up to \$200.00 not to exceed \$800.00 within 12 consecutive months. 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 issued for prescription medication will be issued payable to a licensed pharmacy.
- Counseling Services assistance shall not exceed \$1,000.00 within 12 consecutive months. Services are defined as the following, but not limited to:
 - Contract with professional counseling specialists to provide evaluations and direct treatment to war-affected veterans and to national guards men and women and reservists; or
 - 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.
 - All checks issued for vision and dental assistance will be issued payable to the doctor's office after a detailed quote has been received.
- Vision and Dental assistance to pay for eyeglasses, dental work or dentures is generally not permissible except for the following:
 -
 - Vision assistance may be granted to pay for eyeglasses or contact lenses up to \$1,000 in a 12-month period.
 - Dental assistance may be granted to pay for emergency dental work or dentures up to \$1,000 in a 12-month period.
 - Screening Officers need to be aware that other agencies provide assistance in the respective categories and should ensure the applicant has attempted assistance through these other methods.

- All checks issued for vision and dental assistance will be issued payable to the provider's office after a detailed quote has been received.

V-6 School Supplies and Tuition

- School supplies and/or tuition may be allowable based on Veteran's individual need. School supplies and/or tuition assistance is limited to \$2,500.00. Assistance in this category will not be counted towards the 12-month maximum. Checks 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. Screening Officers need to be aware that there can be other financial assistance available and should ensure the applicant has attempted assistance through other methods.

V-7 Miscellaneous Assistance

Other assistance may be provided if reasonably necessary. Miscellaneous assistance will be limited to \$1,500.00 within 12 consecutive months.

Miscellaneous Assistance can be used for the following, but not limited to:

- Clothing may be provided if a qualified applicant is required to obtain uniforms or specialized clothing or footwear to secure employment.
- Emergency car repair. Veteran must submit two written estimates from reputable auto repair shops. Checks issued for emergency car repair will be made payable directly to the auto repair shop with the lowest bid.
- Other assistance may be provided if reasonably necessary and approved by:
 - A majority of the members of the Cowlitz County Board of Commissioners, or
 - The Cowlitz County Veterans Relief Coordinator and a majority of the members of the Screening Committee.

V-8 Housing Assistance

Housing assistance is used to assist a Veteran with the cost associated with obtaining new housing. Assistance is available once every three years and shall not exceed \$1,200.00. Assistance will not be counted towards the 12-month maximum. 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. Housing Assistance documentation must include, but not limited to:

- A letter from the landlord stating they are willing to accept payment from the County by mail.
- A written (preprinted) rental agreement or agreement with the intent to rent to the applicant signed by the applicant and the landlord.

V-9 Burial/Cremation Expense

Assistance may be provided for the burial or cremation of any deceased indigent veteran or deceased family member of an indigent Veteran who dies without leaving means sufficient to defray funeral expenses. This assistance will be paid without regard to other entitlements that may already have been paid from the fund.

Assistance for a burial may not exceed \$2,000.00.

Assistance for a cremation may not exceed \$1,500.00.

If the deceased has relatives or friends who desire to conduct the burial or cremation, assistance will be provided based on the limits outlined above.

In the event the deceased has no relatives or friends who desire to conduct the burial or cremation, qualified Veteran's organizations may submit an application on behalf of the deceased.

Burial/Cremation expense documentation must provide the following:

- Death Certificate,
- Disposition of the remains, and
- Funeral Home Invoice

Payment of this entitlement will not affect any benefits that may be payable in the future to the veteran's widow(er)s and or dependent children.

V-10 Natural Disaster Assistance

Eligible Veterans who have suffered damage or loss as a result of a natural or catastrophic disaster or other event declared an emergency by state or local officials may receive assistance in the form of a check up to \$1,000.00. This assistance may only be paid one time within any 12 consecutive months 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, windstorms, ice storms, earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, fire, mud slides, and disease outbreaks. 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, this fund will be the "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.

V-11 Appeal Process

Any request for assistance that an applicant feels was not acted upon properly by the Screening Officers can be appealed in writing within 15 days of application denial. The County will make a final determination. The appeal form can be found at the department's website at www.cowlitz.wa.us/hhs. Appeals shall be made in writing, include all applicable documentation, and be mailed to:

Cowlitz County Health & Human Services
Attn: Veterans' Relief Coordinator
1952 9th Avenue
Longview, WA 98632

V-12 National Veterans Organization Facility Expenses

- Nationally-chartered Veterans Organizations
RCW 73.04.080 authorizes rent of their regular meeting place to be paid to any post, camp or chapter of any national organization of veterans chartered by an act of congress which has qualified to accept relief from the veteran's assistance fund of Cowlitz County, provided:
 - Said organization does not own, nor is purchasing property for which organization rent is being paid;
 - The amount to be paid will be a reasonable amount approved by the County Legislative Authority in any one year;

- 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.

V-13 Method of Payment

Cowlitz County Health & Human Services staff will process Veteran's facility expense reimbursement and other non-emergency payments through the voucher system established by the Cowlitz County Auditor.

If a Cowlitz County Veterans' Organization provides relief funds to a Veteran from their own organization's relief fund, they shall not receive reimbursement from the Cowlitz County Veterans' Relief Fund unless specifically stated under Section V: Funding Usage.

Cowlitz County Approvals

Carole Harrison

Carole Harrison, MBA
Director
Cowlitz County Health & Human Services

SECTION V: RECORD OF REVISIONS

Change #	Date Entered	Contents of Change	Initials
Edition 1	2/4/2020	Reformatting of document and update to section V-8 Death/Cremation Expense.	JH
Edition 2	3/4/2020	Formatting corrections to SECTION IV: ELIGIBILITY	JH
Edition 3	3/30/2020	Updating definition to V-9 Natural Disaster Assistance	JH
Edition 4	5/14/2021	Adding definitions for dependents and caregivers. Update income reporting to include income for all dependents.	JH
Edition 5	5/19/2022	Updating language and title to section V-8 Death/Cremation Expense. Updating maximum limits to all categories	JH
Edition 6	2/13/2023	Incorporated federal Poverty Guidelines into document.	CH
Edition 7	3/24/2023	Updating maximum limits to all categories.	ML
Edition 8	5/1/2023	Updating allowable maximum assistance within 12 consecutive months.	ML
Edition 9	7/13/2023	Updating section IV-3	JH
Edition 10	2/5/2024	Updating 2024 Poverty Guidelines	JH
Edition 11	8/20/2024	Updating maximum limits in certain categories	GJ
Edition 12	1/23/2025	Updating 2025 Poverty Guidelines	SS
Edition 13	6/26/2025	Updating language in burial/cremation expense	JH
Edition 14	10/7/2025	Change to rent language and reference to checks	SS
Edition 15	2/2/2026	Updating 2026 Poverty Guidelines	SS

APPENDIX A: COWLITZ COUNTY VETERANS RELIEF FUND POVERTY GUIDELINES

Veterans Relief Fund 2026 Poverty Guidelines		
Persons in Family/Household	Poverty Guidelines	150% as indicated in the Policies & Procedures Manual
1	\$15,960.00	\$23,940.00
2	\$21,640.00	\$32,460.00
3	\$27,320.00	\$40,980.00
4	\$33,000.00	\$48,500.00
5	\$38,680.00	\$58,020.00
6	\$44,360.00	\$66,540.00
7	\$50,040.00	\$75,060.00
8	\$55,720.00	\$83,580.00
For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$5,680 for each additional person.		

Source: U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines Used to Determine Financial Eligibility for Certain Programs <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>