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POLICY

(FINAL)

Public Health Standard(s): 11.1, 11.2**Cancels:****See Also:****Approved by:**

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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Board of County Commissioners

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Cowlitz County Health and Human Services

VETERANS RELIEF FUND

(VRF)

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

(REVISED)

May 14, 2021

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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 eighteen (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 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

- 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 one hundred fifty (150) percent or less of the current federally established poverty level.
- 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 twelve (12) consecutive months. The twelve (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 eighteen (18) years old; or
 - Between the ages of eighteen (18) and twenty-three (23) years old **and** enrolled in school full time; or
 - Permanently disabled before they turn eighteen (18)
 - Parent
 - The parent must be biological, adoptive, or foster parent of the Veteran.
- Caregiver
 - Must be at least eighteen (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 warrants or 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 eighteen (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.

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.

If the application does not meet requirements of the program, the application should be denied by the organization. If an exception 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 a pickup time by the Veterans' organization 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.

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

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 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:

- 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 twelve hundred dollars (\$1,200) within twelve (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 |
| Miscellaneous | Housing Assistance |
| Death/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 three (3) month period up to the amount of one hundred fifty dollars (\$150.00) for a Veteran who does **not** support a family.; or
- Veteran's supporting a family may be approved once within a two (2) month period up to the amount of one hundred fifty dollars (\$150.00). Proof may be requested to show Veteran supports a family; and
- Applicants may request to split the one hundred fifty dollars (\$150.00) request into two seventy five dollar (\$75.00) requests with the following requirements:
 - Must submit a new application
 - Must wait 30 calendar days to request the remaining funds.

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 seven hundred dollars (\$700.00) within twelve (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. 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. 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.
- 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 and firewood. Utility assistance is limited to a maximum of four hundred (\$400.00) within twelve (12) consecutive months. 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. 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 3 times per year for up to one hundred fifty dollars (\$150.00) not to exceed four hundred fifty dollars (\$450) within twelve (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 or warrants issued for prescription medication will be issued payable to a licensed pharmacy.
- Counseling Services assistance shall not exceed three hundred fifty dollars (\$350.00) within twelve (12) consecutive months. Services are defined as the following, but not limited 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; or
 - (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.
 - All checks or warrants issued for vision and dental assistance will be issued payable to the doctor's office after a detailed quote has been received.
- Visions and Dental assistance to pay for eyeglasses, dental work or dentures is generally not permissible except for the following:
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - All checks or warrants issued for vision and dental assistance will be issued payable to the doctor's office after a detailed quote has been received.

V-6 Miscellaneous Assistance

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

- 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.
- 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-7 Housing Assistance

Housing assistance is used to assist a Veteran with the cost associated with obtaining new housing. 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. 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:

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

V-8 Death/Cremation Expense

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 indigent veteran or 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 of one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00) nor be 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 payment may not exceed the limit established by the County legislative authority of one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00) nor be less than three hundred dollars (\$300.00) will be made to the relatives or friends.

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

Death/Cremation expense documentation must provide the following:

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

The Cowlitz County Legislative Authority shall be reviewed bi-annually, at which time the limit may be increased or remain the same as determined by the County Legislative Authority.

V-9 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 warrant up to five hundred dollars (\$500.00). This assistance may only be paid one time within any twelve (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, wind storms, 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, 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.

V-10 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 fifteen (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 documentation, and be mailed to:

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

V-11 Veterans' Facility Expenses

- Nationally-chartered Veterans Organizations
RCW 73.04.080 authorizes rent to be paid to nationally-chartered Veteran organizations, 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.
- Veterans' Service Center
Upon approval of the County, funds from the Veterans' Relief Fund may be made available to pay facility expenses for the Veterans' Service Center.

V-12 Method of Payment

The 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

DocuSigned by:
Carole Harrison
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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