



**TVC Sunset Report Recommendations
Management Update**

2019

1.4 Direct TVC to create a complaint process, make the complaint process accessible to the public, and track complaint data.

This recommendation would direct the agency to establish a complaint process as already required in law and post information about how to file a complaint on the agency website along with a simple complaint form. Under this recommendation, TVC staff should develop procedures that clearly lay out all phases of the complaint process and centrally track and analyze all complaint information to identify trends and issues.

TVC should develop the policy and post information to its website by January 1, 2019.

TVC Response:

In FY19, TVC established a complaint log that tracks complaints submitted to the agency. The complaint log is used to track submitted complaints throughout the complaints process and to ensure a timely response. Additionally, in order to identify trends and issues, data from the complaints log is shared with the Program Operations Director, Resource Management Director, Deputy Executive Director, and Executive Director.

External complaints are primarily received through the “Contact” section of TVC’s website at <https://www.tvc.texas.gov/contact/> via simple complaint form, which will generate two emails by the website: a responsive email sent to the individual Complainant, acknowledging TVC’s receipt of the complaint, and a second email sent to TVC’s Government Relations Section for logging and assignment to the appropriate department, program, and/or section for review and resolution.

In the event a complaint is received through other channels (such as phone, fax, letter, or in-person) the complaint will be recorded by the employee receiving it and forwarded to the Government Relations section for logging, tracking, and processing.

In general, most complaints will follow this process:

1. Complaint submitted to TVC.
2. Complaint received: The Government Relations Section will log the complaint and route it to the appropriate department within the Agency.
3. Department Response: Once notified by the Government Relations Section, a department has one business day to respond to the Government Relations Section with a plan to address the complaint and/or to gather additional information.
4. Resolution Development: After the relevant facts have been gathered, the responding department will propose a resolution, which must be approved by the Program Operations Manager, Resource Management Director and/or Deputy Executive Director.
5. Final Resolution: The Complainant is notified of the final resolution/action taken.

**Complaints submitted by current employees are sent to the human resources department who will then coordinate an appropriate course of action and response.

2.4 Direct TVC to temporarily report on claims staffing and outcome data analyses.

Under this recommendation, TVC would prepare two short-term reports biennially for four years, as a management action related to Recommendations 2.1 and 2.2. TVC should develop a report analyzing staffing levels and effectiveness of the agency's special projects. TVC should also provide a comprehensive overall assessment of claims performance, lessons learned, and needed improvements.

The agency should present the first report to the Veterans Commission no later than January 1, 2019, and the second no later than January 1, 2021. TVC should also make this information publicly available on its website.

TVC Response:

An oral report was provided to the Veterans Commission on February 6, 2019, which was the first Commission meeting in 2019. The written report was published on TVC's website.

To meet reporting requirements as set in 2.4, the Agency has a Policy and Performance Program Specialist who is dedicated to analyzing performance data.

Additionally, the Claims Operations Manager works with the Human Resources Director to monitor staffing levels, as well as turnover rates. This information is used to make recommendations to Executive Leadership on needed improvements

2.5 Direct TVC to strengthen support for claims staff and preserve institutional knowledge.

Under this recommendation, the agency would be directed to ensure claims staff has the guidance and resources needed to file high-quality claims for veterans and to preserve the substantial knowledge of more experienced staff. TVC should do the following:

- **Provide training and easy reference materials such as checklists, flow charts, and tips on submitting claims.**

TVC Response:

The agency has created checklists and flow charts to provide counselors with easy reference materials. The new eLearning Initial Training course will include these reference materials to assist new Counselors and VCSOs.

- **Ensure all claims district managers share best practices among management and with field staff and identify key areas where more training is needed based on feedback from claims managers and the Strike Force Team.**

TVC Response:

TVC has incorporated the Strike Force (SF) team into all trainings by utilizing the SF members as content developers and instructors for classes and online training. The purpose behind this is to share the best practices learned by the SF team with all field staff. Experienced counselors and VCSOs are also utilized as instructors for this purpose. The District Managers (DMs) hold quarterly conference calls and always have the SF team on these calls to share best practices with the Districts.

The agency and the District Managers meet on a quarterly basis for training and to share best practices. This has been highly effective, as the District Manager can then share these best practices with their field staff.

- **Document the Strike Force Team’s processes, roles, and results TVC should provide these guidelines and document processes by January 1, 2019.**

TVC Response:

TVC created a Strike Force (SF) Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) document, which identifies the purpose and roles of the SF team.

2.6 Direct TVC to add information to its website about the claims process, including forms, checklists, basic claims information, and embedded VA resources.

The agency would be directed to add clear, useful information to the website allowing veterans to access information on the claims process and necessary documentation before visiting a TVC office. For example, the website should include the following:

- A checklist of documentation veterans should bring with them
- A step-by-step guide to filing claims
- Answers to frequently asked questions about claims
- Embedded VA resources, including already available videos and graphics about the claims process TVC should ensure claims information on the website remains current and could use other states, including Colorado and California, as examples of providing clear, useful information to help prepare veterans. Providing more information on the website would help veterans understand the claims process upfront and prepare for meeting with TVC claims counselors, improving customer service and reducing staff time needed to assist veterans

The agency should make these improvements by January 1, 2019

TVC Response:

The Communications team has added information required by this directive to the Claims section of the TVC website.

2.7 Direct TVC to allow veterans to schedule appointments for claims counseling, while maintaining the option for walk-in services.

Under this recommendation, TVC would be directed to implement an appointment policy to counsel veterans at a set time, while still allowing veterans to walk in at TVC’s field offices. To implement this recommendation, the agency could assign certain claims counselors primarily to appointments while leaving others free to counsel walk-in veterans, or could stagger appointments throughout the day. TVC should ensure that walk-in veterans who cannot be seen on the same day are scheduled for an appointment in the future. Allowing veterans to make appointments would ensure all veterans seeking claims counseling from TVC are able to get help filing claims and reduce the number of veterans turned away from TVC’s field offices

The agency should implement an appointment policy by January 1, 2019.

TVC Response:

In May 2018, the agency wrote a policy letter to outline a plan of action to implement an appointment program for major Claims offices by June 5, 2018. Since June 2018, TVC has had an appointment program in place at major claims offices. Additionally, District Managers send an appointments quarterly report on the number of veterans/dependents seen, walk offs, rescheduled appointments, and cancelled appointments.

3.1 Direct TVC to extend the length of its grant cycle from one to two years.

TVC Response:

During the August 2018 Quarterly Commission Meeting, the TVC Commissioners approved adding the comptroller's contract language to the Fund for Veterans' Assistance (FVA)'s Request for Applications (RFAs), giving the Commission the option to renew FVA grants for an additional year by extending the length of the grantee's cycle from one to two years. This option is being phased in; specifically, the option to renew is currently available for the 2019-2020 General Assistance and Veteran Treatment Court grants and will be included in the 2020-2021 Housing for Texas Heroes and Veterans Mental Health RFAs. The criteria accepted by the Commission for grant renewal is also laid out in the FVA's Request for Application (RFA), "To be considered for a renewal, grantees must meet both performance and expenditure benchmarks and have no outstanding compliance issues on the 3rd Quarter Performance and Expenditure Report." Grantees meeting the criteria will be recommended by the FVA for a renewal, so they essentially have a two-year grant, in addition, the Texas Veterans Commission reviews the Texas Lottery Commission annual estimated revenues due to fluctuation in lottery ticket sales that may impact the available funds supporting the FVA program. This is advantageous as both provides incentive to the grantees to meet their benchmarks on time and prevents FVA funding being obligated for an extended period by organizations that are unable to execute the term of their grant.

3.2 Direct the agency to formalize the roles and training of the commission and the grants advisory committee to improve quality and transparency in the evaluation process.

TVC Response:

FVA hosted two training webinars in Dec 2018 for the FVA Advisory Committee members, and their first meeting in February 2019, included training from TVC's General Counsel and FVA staff. Please refer to the attached agenda, Items IV and XIII. FVA will conduct annual Advisory Committee training each December as a refresher for sitting committee members and introductory for new committee members appointed by the Commission. The Commissioners do not receive the next cycle's grant applications for review until April 2019, and no training has been scheduled.

3.3 Direct TVC to develop and track enhanced grantee performance measures to better evaluate the benefit of its grant funding to veterans.

FVA added standard outcome measures related to service categories to the RFAs for the 2019-2020 cycle. Grantees who report this data will be selected in May 2019, by the Commission and begin their project on July 1, 2019. The first performance reports for these grants will be in October 2019.

41 Direct TVC to restructure and streamline the scope and expense of its annual conference.

Under this recommendation, TVC would be directed to rethink the role and limit the size and scope of its resource-intensive annual conference. The agency should only pay for staff and partners who most need training to attend such a conference, instead of making it an annual event for all staff. TVC should prioritize attendance for new field staff, managers, or direct service providers, and rotate which staff attends the annual conference each year. The agency should also ensure field offices remain open, allowing veterans to receive services during the week of the conference. As part of this recommendation, the agency should only pay annual conference training costs for veteran county service officers who have not yet completed their training requirements through other options. The agency should ensure any officers who have completed national training requirements approved under TVC's proposed rules use that training to satisfy their TVC continuing education hours instead of duplicating the requirement at the annual conference. The agency should also track officers participating in non-TVC trainings and prioritize training assistance to counties with limited resources for veteran county service officers. TVC should continue to allow officers to attend training at their own cost if they do not receive TVC support. These changes would

4.3 Direct TVC to prioritize online training and other cost-effective tools to facilitate regular collaboration among staff and partners

The agency should implement more year-round and online training and other collaboration tools by January 1, 2019.

TVC Response:

The agency has designed a new training plan for 2019 and has discontinued the use of single agency-wide conference for training. This plan incorporates new methods of training, which includes online training, and the following classroom training opportunities: district training, advanced VCSO training, and TVC fall training.

Online Training:

- **Initial Training:** Initial Training is now an on-demand course and will be provided as needed through a web-based system. Immediately following on-boarding, a newly hired employee or newly appointed VCSO is eligible for enrollment into the Initial Training program. Up to 24-hours of Initial Training may be accrued. A TVC senior counselor mentor, as well as a senior VCSO, will be assigned to the VCSO during the Initial Training. o Content for Initial Training includes Service-Connected Compensation, Roles & Partnerships, Claim Overview, Interview Process, Nonservice-Connected Pension, Survivors Benefits, Appeals, Veteran Benefits and an Initial Training test.
- **Webinars:** Ten 90-minute webinars will be provided throughout the year worth a total of 15 credit hours. Credit will be accrued on an hour-by-hour basis. There is no limit to the amount of credit hours you may receive via webinar. o Training topics will be either TVC Claims focused or National Veterans Legal Services Program focused.
- **Webinar Case Studies:** There will be two online training sessions per year worth 6 credit hours. These trainings will be offered during the months of *January and July*. The case studies will consist of service connection, pension, and appeals related topics.

Classroom Training:

District Training: VCSOs will be able to obtain training by district. This training will be conducted by a District Manager or a senior Claims Counselor and will be offered in *April and May*, for up to 12 credit hours.

- Training topics will be TVC Claims focused.

Advanced VCSO Training: At the request of a VCSO, TVC may provide advanced training for a localized group of VCSOs. Credit will be accrued on an hour-by-hour basis. This training will be done by the respective District Manager, or an Office Supervisor.

- The requesting VCSO will coordinate the training, to include the training topics and the logistics of the training.

TVC Fall Training: This training will be offered during the months of *September and October*, for up to 12 credit hours.

- The training will focus on collaboration and TVC Claims related topics.

42 Direct TVC to track and analyze detailed training costs to identify potential savings and improvements

TVC Response:

Through CAPPs, TVC is currently tracking, through the use of event training codes, costs per training event, which will allow TVC to identify potential savings and improvements.

43 Direct TVC to prioritize online training and other cost-effective tools to facilitate regular collaboration among staff and partners.

TVC Response:

TVC has begun prioritizing online training and other cost-effective tools. For example: Initial Training for CVSOs is now an on-demand course and is provided as needed through a web-based system.

5.3 The commission should implement requirements for encouraging purchasing from historically underutilized businesses

This recommendation would direct the agency to comply with statutory HUB requirements by adopting a formal HUB policy, creating HUB subcontracting plans for large contracts, creating a HUB forum, appointing a HUB coordinator, and developing a mentor-protégé program.

The agency should have these policies in place by January 1, 2019.

TVC Response:

The Contract and Procurement Manager has been working with the Lead Purchaser and a staff member of the Veterans Entrepreneur Program (VEP), to draft the formal HUB Program policies, forms and procedures for the TVC Mentor-Protégé Program, and the TVC HUB Forum Program to fulfill TVC's compliance with the State of Texas statutory HUB requirements.

The TVC Lead Purchaser and HUB Coordinator are responsible for performing the annual and semi-annual HUB reporting for TVC, and preparing the supplemental letter as needed. During the procurement process, the Lead Purchaser is responsible for ensuring the appropriate number of HUBs are solicited as required for the various types of procurements. The Lead Purchaser reviews competitive bid responses to ensure compliance with HUB subcontracting requirements. The Lead Purchaser ensures the selected HUB vendors are recorded properly in CAPPs. They also provide

guidance to vendors when requested on how to become HUB-certified with the State of Texas. These HUB Coordinator procurement functions have historically been performed by the TVC Purchaser or Lead Purchaser.

VEP has been actively engaged in working with several different vendors to establish some Mentor-Protégé relationships for TVC.

TVC will be co-hosting and participating in a HUB Forum along with several other state agencies, currently scheduled to be held on April 18, 2019. VEP is taking the lead for TVC to coordinate with the other agencies.

Finance has also been in communication with the Communication team to update our website to add new "Procurement" and "HUB Program" pages to the TVC website with the new HUB policies and procedures. The new page(s) will include information on purchasing/contracting with TVC and the State of Texas in general, and HUB certification information for vendors.