



Date: March 4, 2016

To: Board of County Commissioners

From: Keith MacNamara, Veterans' Services Officer and
Erik Kropp, Deputy County Administrator

Re: Staffing Request

At the Board's March 9, 2016 Work Session, we will discuss staffing needs in the Veterans' Services Office and a request to add an additional Assistant Veterans Services Officer position.

Background

The Deschutes County Veterans' Services Office (VSO) advocates for, and assists veterans and their family members in applying to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs, and local agencies for benefits that may be available to them. The wide range of benefits includes the following:

- Service connected disability compensation
- Non-service connected pensions
- Widow/widower pensions
- Dependency and indemnity compensation
- Burial benefits
- Medical benefits
- Home loans
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Clothing allowance
- Adapted equipment applications
- Home improvement for handicapped adaptability

In addition to limited walk in services and scheduled appointments in Bend, staff from the Veterans' Services Office provide outreach services, benefit presentations, and appointments in La Pine, Redmond, Sisters, assisted living facilities, homes, and other locations. Finally, working with Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC), the office has been assisting veterans with transportation to medical appointments.

Service Level Trends

The VSO updated the Board of Commissioners in March 2015. At the time, the wait time for scheduling appointments was approximately 3 weeks. Currently, the wait time is approximately 5 weeks. The table below shows the average walk-in clients per month, average total interviews per month, and the average scheduled appointments per day going back to Fiscal Year 2011-2012. All three of these indicators show a dramatic increase in the request for services.

	Walk-ins per month	Total interviews per month	Average scheduled appointments per day
FY 2011-12	43	71	4.1
FY 2012-13	32	88	5.1
FY 2013-14	55	98	5.7
FY 2014-15	51	98	5.7
FY 2015-16	67	127	7.3
FY 2016-17*	108	168	10.5

*Based on 8 months

Staffing and Previous Budget Request

The VSO is comprised of three full-time positions: the Veterans Services Officer, an Assistant Veterans Services Officer, and a Customer Service Clerk II. Only the Veterans Services Officer and Assistant Veterans Services Officer are accredited by the VA and allowed to fill out, process, and submit claims. The accreditation process can take two years while working in the field of veterans benefit claims. The office also hires federal work study students through Central Oregon Community College. The work study students assist with filing, returning phone calls, scanning documents, shredding documents and other clerical functions. However, the students are not accredited and cannot work on claims processing or submission.

Last year the Veterans' Services Office submitted a budget "add package" requesting an additional Assistant Veterans Service Officer position. After much discussion, the Budget Committee recommended, and the Board approved, adding \$40,000 in General Funds to the "extra help" line item of the VSO budget. The Budget Committee discussed the concept of the VSO using volunteers and staff from a temporary employment agency to help address the back log of processing veterans' claims. Even though hiring temporary staff helps with administrative and clerical office functions, the added staff cannot process claims and the claims backlog persists. After the County's budget process was completed, the State of Oregon VA added an additional \$25,000 in State Expansion and Enhancement funding for Deschutes County.

Cost and Staff Recommendation

The total cost to add an Assistant Veterans Service Officer position is \$67,882. If approved, the funding for the position would come from the additional \$25,000 in state funds, \$40,000 from the "extra help" line item (General Fund transfer approved in the FY 2015-16 budget), and \$2,882 as an additional General Fund transfer. Staff recommends adding a 1.0 FTE Assistant Veterans Services Officer position in the current fiscal year.