



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON

January 18, 2006



Mr. Harley Thomas  
Associate Legislative Director  
Paralyzed Veterans of America  
801 18<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20006-3517

Dear Mr. Thomas:

I appreciate the work that the Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) Advisory Committee has accomplished in developing recommendations to assist the VA in implementing and evaluating its volunteer program.

Our response to the Committee's recommendations is enclosed. VA concurs with the recommendations, except for one. Our concurrence is based on the understanding that voluntary service is local in implementation, and each facility will need some flexibility in achieving the goals of the recommendations.

Thank you for your participation in this important Committee. I look forward to receiving further reports on your deliberations following future meetings.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. James Nicholson".

R. James Nicholson

Enclosure

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)  
RESPONSE  
TO THE MAY 28, 2005 RECOMMENDATIONS  
OF THE  
VAVS NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (NAC)**

**Recommendation 1:** "When termination of a volunteer is warranted, VHA Handbook 1620.1.4.b (pg. 4) states: 'Written notification of termination will be sent to the volunteer, and if affiliated, the VAVS Representative.' It is recommended that, if the volunteer to be terminated is the VAVS Representative, written notification of termination must also be sent to the National Representative and/or the National Certifying Official of the affiliated organization."

**VA RESPONSE:** Concur. Communication is key to a successful volunteer program. Providing notification to national veterans service organization officials of actions by the Voluntary Service Program Manager keeps communication flowing and encourages the full participation of each organization.

**Recommendation 2:** "To attract youth organizations and business entities to the VAVS program, it is recommended that VA create a recognition/awards program acknowledging the meaningful contributions of those organizations or groups that, while not eligible for NAC membership, have had a positive impact on the VAVS program."

**VA RESPONSE:** Concur. Recognizing the valuable contributions of any volunteer or organization is paramount. NAC will develop a mechanism to recognize and reward these organizations nationally.

**Recommendation 3:** "To ensure the continuation of the VAVS program in perpetuity, and to sustain and expand the VAVS contributions to the fulfillment of VA's mission, VA has set a priority to target the recruitment of VAVS volunteers in the 20-40 year age group. To capitalize on the computer skills of this target group, it is recommended that a discussion page be added to the VAVS website, so that volunteers can share their experiences, generate ideas, and recruit new volunteers."

**VA RESPONSE:** Concur. The growing number of individuals utilizing the World Wide Web is evident of the need to further expand the VAVS presence there. Providing an opportunity for active volunteers to post their experiences in a "guest book" format could provide motivation to others to volunteer.

**Recommendation 4:** "To sustain the momentum of new volunteers and to increase retention, it is recommended that VA urge each facility utilizing VAVS volunteers to issue a thank you letter from the facility director upon completion of the first three (3) months of volunteer activity."

**VA RESPONSE:** Nonconcur. Many stations already acknowledge new volunteers in some fashion and it is not necessary to mandate such an action. Volunteerism is changing and the motivation for continued service is very diverse. Allowing stations to customize recognition activities is crucial to volunteers.

**Recommendation 5:** "*Make a Difference Day* is a unique program that inspires and rewards volunteers, and began with a simple idea: Put your own cares on hold for one (1) day to care for someone else. Sponsored by USA WEEKEND Magazine and its more than 600 carrier newspapers, and in partnership with the Points of Light Foundation, *Make a Difference Day* is the largest and most encompassing national day of helping others. This one-day event is held annually on the fourth Saturday in October (if participation on Saturday is not possible for religious reasons, projects may be done on Sunday). It is therefore recommended that VA encourage local facilities to coordinate annual programs or events (e.g. homeless fairs, stand downs, etc.), in partnership with community organizations, on *Make a Difference Day*. VA's participation in this national event promoting community involvement would raise VA's visibility, enhance VA's mission, strengthen VA's community ties, and promote recruitment of VAVS volunteers."

**VA RESPONSE:** Concur. Each facility will be encouraged to participate in "*Make a Difference Day*," as they are able or to partner with other community organizations.



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WASHINGTON

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*Commemorating 75 Years of Service*

Mr. Michael Manning  
Director, Elks National Veterans  
Service Commission  
Benevolent Order of the Elks  
2750 Lakeview Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60614

Dear Mr. Manning:

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