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White Paper: Interagency Council on Veterans February 22-23, 2012

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White Paper

*Interagency Council on Veterans
February 22-23, 2012*

By California Research Bureau

May 15, 2012

Please contact the California Research Bureau for more information regarding this report. CRB may be reached at (916) 653-7843 or crb@library.ca.gov. This and other CRB reports can be accessed at www.csl.gov/crb. Rebecca E. Blanton and Tonya D. Lindsay, Ph.D., Senior Policy Analysts for the CRB, are the primary authors of this report.

INTRODUCTION

Governor Edmund G. Brown created the Interagency Council on Veterans (ICV) to improve how veterans' services are coordinated across local, state and federal governments. To that end, the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) brought together governmental organizations in December 2011 and nongovernmental organizations in January 2012 to help CalVet do some preliminary planning for the ICV. In February 2012, CalVet Secretary Peter Gravett and Labor and Workforce Development Secretary Marty Morgenstern convened the inaugural conference of the ICV to discuss – among other topics – veterans' service needs, gaps in veterans' services, and obstacles to meeting veterans' needs, as well as establishing priorities, next steps and potential solutions.

This white paper presents the California Research Bureau's (CRB) findings from the qualitative discussion data produced at the February 22-23 conference. During several rounds of discussions about veterans' needs and services, four key themes emerged. Conference participants identified the need to improve the transition process from military to civilian life; the need for better public relations/outreach; the need to improve data capture and data sharing; and the need for more funding as the key areas in which improvement would make the biggest difference in veterans' lives.

This white paper provides a concise overview of CRB's analysis of the data gleaned from discussion rounds during the two-day ICV conference. After a brief description of the facilitation process, we discuss our methods of data collection and analysis. We provide several options for ICV's future steps toward improving veterans' services in California. Finally, we present our findings followed by a discussion and brief conclusion.*

FACILITATION

For the February 22-23 ICV Conference, CalVet asked CRB to design a facilitation method to gather information about veterans' needs, services available to veterans, gaps in services, potential solutions, and next steps. To structure information gathering, CRB adopted a modified version of the World Café[†] meeting facilitation method. CRB employed additional facilitation methods, including a ranking exercise and "report-outs" to the ICV to increase the amount of information gathered during the conference.

The World Café facilitation method is designed to gather large amounts of information from meeting participants. Groups of four or five people discuss a question or topic. Group members then rotate to new groups to discuss the same topic and spread information even as they take in new ideas. This continues for several rounds. While group members discuss a topic, facilitators circle the room and record information about the themes emerging from the conversations. Each

* For more detailed information about the meetings, the conference and the discussion content, please see the "Meeting Summary of the Interagency Council on Veterans, February 22-23, 2012" and additional meeting summaries. Summaries available at: www.icv.ca.gov/

† For more information on the World Café method, please see <http://www.theworldcafe.com/index.html>.

table also has a notepad for note taking by group members and paper tablecloths on which members may write down information or draw pictures.

The method results in key themes emerging across discussion groups. Participants move between groups and ideas “cross-pollinate.” The themes that resonate with many participants are recorded on the summary sheets and in other notes repeatedly. Less resonate ideas appear in notes and summaries less frequently.

The Café-style facilitation is useful at gleaning information from participants. However, it is not designed for consensus building or deciding priorities. To help identify participant priorities, participants engaged in a ranking exercise. Once participants had an opportunity to discuss veterans’ needs and facilitators recorded those needs on long sheets of paper, participants reviewed the lists. Facilitators gave participants four adhesive flags and asked them to place the flags next to their priorities for veterans.

METHODOLOGY

Data

Participants and facilitators worked together to systematically produce written material, or data, during the conference. The written materials include summary sheets, table notepads, tablecloths, and additional participant notes gathered at the end of the meeting by the facilitators. For the purposes of this white paper, CRB employed the summary sheets as qualitative data for analysis.

Summary sheets contain discussion themes excerpted from the tablecloths that participants wrote notes on during each round and from facilitators who circulated to “eavesdrop” on participants’ discussions. Facilitators wrote the summary sheets by discussion round topic during and after each round. When given an opportunity to review the summary sheets, participants also added themes and ideas they thought were missing. Because facilitators employed the summary sheets to capture the themes and key ideas generated *and* because participants had an opportunity to review and fill out the summary sheets with any key items they felt were missing, we opt in this white paper to only analyze the summaries.*

Thematic Categories

California Research Bureau performed a content analysis of the needs, gaps, and obstacles data and also of the solutions and next steps data. For the needs, gaps, and obstacles content analysis, we counted ideas across summary sheets because all three topics relate conceptually (i.e., they are relevant to the delivery of services to veterans) and because we discovered that participants crossed discussion areas during these rounds (e.g., mentioning a gap in services while discussing needs). Similarly, for the solutions and next steps content analysis we counted ideas across

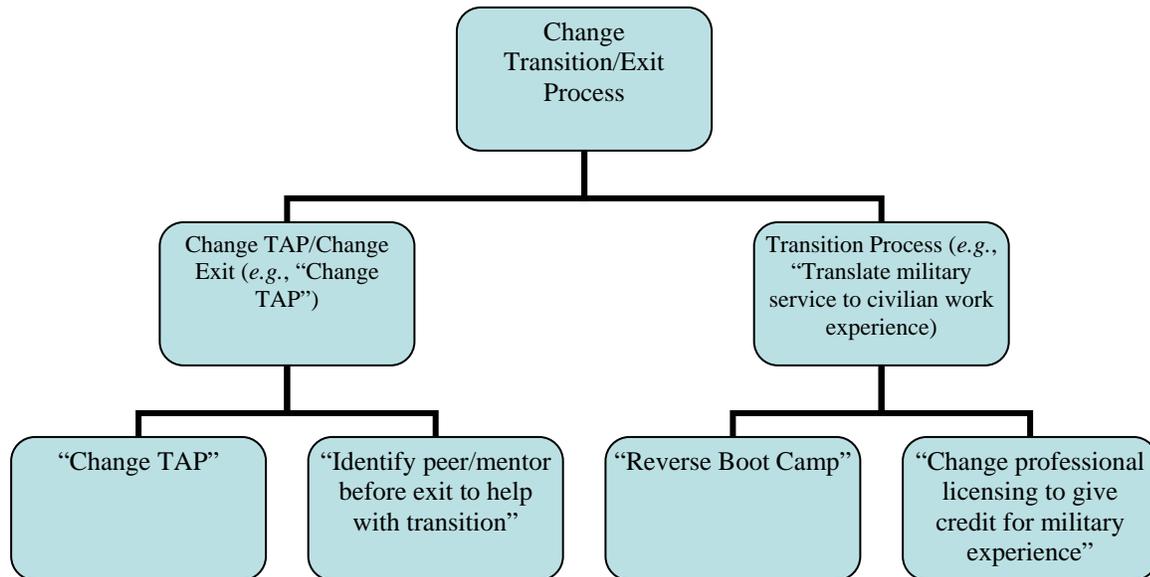
* To verify that summary sheets do indeed capture key ideas and themes, CRB performed an analysis of the Health Pod table materials to see if additional themes or ideas emerged. This did not occur.

summary sheets because the topics relate conceptually and because we discovered that participants crossed discussion areas during these rounds.

We divided the analysis of the discussions into two segments: needs, gaps, and obstacles and solutions and next steps. We began the content analysis of the needs-gaps-obstacles data by listing the individual items from the summary sheet data and then combining similar items into similar themes. For items to be combined, the concepts had to logically “hang together.” The summary sheets contained 329 items. We grouped these items into 44 themes. Upon review, CRB combined thematic categories such as the “Transition Assistance Program” (TAP) with a more general category of “change transition programs.” Similarly, we combined summary data about “program specific funding,” “seeking federal or grant funds,” and the “lack of funding” into “funding.” We ended with 34 thematic categories.*

The same process was used for the solutions and next steps analysis. We listed each item then classified by each theme. Because 34 themes had been established during the analysis of the needs, gaps-obstacles, we initially employed those themes. Not all themes established in the needs, gaps, and obstacles round were necessary for the solutions and next steps. We refined and added themes for solutions and next steps themes as necessary. Ultimately, 20 themes for solutions and next steps emerged.

Figure 1. Example of Thematic Refinement.



* Lists of thematic categories are located in Appendices A and B of the “Meeting Summary of the Interagency Council on Veterans, February 22-23, 2012” located at www.icv.ca.gov

FINDINGS

Needs, Gaps, and Obstacles

Four key themes emerged from the needs, gaps, and obstacles rounds: funding (45 ideas), public relations/outreach (40 ideas), changing transition programs (33 ideas), and issues with data sharing and databases (32 ideas). A clear break emerged between the top four themes and all other themes. The next most frequently discussed theme was the need for veteran training, with 21 ideas.

“Funding” includes program-specific funding needs, the need for veterans’ service programs to pursue federal and grant funding, the need for staff training funding, the need for funds to go directly to veterans, and limitations on current funding streams. “Public relations/outreach” includes ideas about the need to increase awareness of services and programs, the need to conduct more veteran-specific outreach at events such as health and education fairs, and the need to advertise specific organizations. “Changing transition programs” includes ideas about changing the current TAP program, the need to help veterans transition between military and civilian services, and the need to develop methods for translating military skills into educational credits and work experience. Finally, “data-sharing and databases” includes ideas about identifying veterans, collecting data, identifying data sets with information about veterans, and overcoming agency silos or by sharing data among agencies.

Priorities

Priorities, as identified by the number of flags participants placed next to ideas on the needs summary sheets, differ from the content analysis findings in three of the top five instances. Participants prioritized different needs than they spent time discussing in small groups. Similar to the discussion content analysis findings, participants ranked changing the exit or transition process and data and data-sharing with 59 and 19 flags, respectively. Different from the content analysis findings, participants ranked the need for a one-stop shop or a hub for services as the second most important need for veterans with 44 flags. Lower on the priority list is the need for transitional housing (20 flags) and peer-to-peer support programs (19 flags).

Solutions and Next Steps

Ideas that participants generated in the solutions and next steps rounds are more evenly distributed across thematic categories, with one exception. Participants generated ideas related to the public relations/outreach theme as a solution or next step far more often than any other thematic category (20 ideas). This theme appeared in specific and general ideas including advertising the 2-1-1 program in California, increasing service provider knowledge of programs for veterans, and increasing service provider knowledge about alternative services for veterans. Changing regulations or legislation and increasing data capture and data sharing came in as close seconds with 14 ideas each. As with the public relations/outreach theme, both specific and general ideas appeared. Ideas include specific suggestions to amend parts of California Penal Code to better serve veterans (e.g., change Penal Code §1170.9). For data capture and data sharing, participants listed general ideas such as identifying more veterans and participants listed the need for agencies to share information.

DISCUSSION: HOW MIGHT THE ICV MOVE FORWARD?

This paper presents, in brief, an aggregated count of the qualitative information gathered at the February 2012 ICV Conference. It is not meant to be exhaustive in its coverage of the content of the meeting, nor does it provide specific steps in any one thematic area for future action. Instead, based on participant data systematically gathered at the ICV Conference, CRB presents the ICV options for moving forward.

Emerging from the conference discussions about needs, gaps, and obstacles is an articulation of veterans' needs that moves beyond addressing only health, only education, only housing, or only employment; veterans' needs are best addressed by implementing strategies to coordinate myriad services. One option for the ICV as it moves forward is to implement strategies to address the central discussion themes:

- Data-sharing/databases
- Public relations/outreach
- Improving transition programs
- Funding

This analysis reveals that funding needs dominated the conversations. We recognize funding as critical for programs and for the ability to continue to provide services to veterans. However, forward movement in other thematic areas may be more practical for the ICV at this time. Data-sharing and data capture present proximate opportunities for short-term and long-term gains. And, implementing simple outreach strategies may broadly expand knowledge of veterans' services. We would encourage the ICV to improve all four thematic areas identified by participants.

Data-sharing and Databases

Data may come in the forms of lists, individual-level descriptions, and assessments and may be collected to answer specific questions. Lists may identify veterans, programs, services, and/or funding streams and provide information for hubs, portals, and transition programs. Individual-level descriptions may include demographics (e.g., sex category, race or ethnic category, age), enrollment in programs, receipt of services, income, level of education, years of service, and occupation among other information aimed at tracking veteran outcomes. Assessments may produce data useful to matching traits and skills to employment and areas of study. Data collection produces data as it relates to specific things a provider, veteran, or the ICV may want to know about veterans (e.g., needs specific to women, rural, Native American, and/or disabled veterans).

Participants identified one or another of these types of data as they discussed data-sharing and databases. The ICV may want to focus on developing data-sharing agreements among State agencies and non-State agencies to know more about veterans. They may opt also to create databases that function as information hubs for one-stop shops, transition programs, and service providers, as well as for Internet access by veterans. California Research Bureau may be able to assist the ICV in its endeavors. One example would be to assist with developing Memoranda of Understanding and Data-sharing Agreements, turning lists into easily-accessible and user-

friendly databases, analyzing demographic data, and answering specific questions the ICV may ask about veterans by using data as the basis for analysis.

Increasing Knowledge

Delivering knowledge about programs, veterans and services to those who need to know is important to conference participants. Implementing a media campaign and outreach strategy that includes advertising veteran-specific services to veterans and providers; public service announcements; breaking down stereotypes about veterans; wide distribution of the CalVet Resource Book; having CalVet educate providers and employers about veteran-specific services, benefits, and eligibility criteria; and marketing veteran skills each may play a part in getting veterans' needs met.

Improving Transition

Improving transition services from military to civilian life was a recurring theme in the needs, gaps, and obstacles rounds. This theme includes not only revamping the TAP program; but also points to developing services that translate military job skills and training into civilian terms and education credits; developing peer or mentor programs to assist with transition; providing service provider contact information to veterans; explaining service application time limits and eligibility requirements to veterans, creating an easy-to-use and up-to-date resource book; and increasing outreach from county veterans' service officers.

The ICV may also consider transition programs as central to connecting veterans to one-stop shops in the civilian world. Creating one-stop shops where veterans live may be functional and help to streamline receipt of services. Participants identified placing healthcare, education, housing, and employment services all on one campus and in locations where veterans reside. Centralizing services in this way may also be a way of reducing duplication of services and cutting operating expenses.

Funding

Participants repeatedly cited problems with program funding. Organizations need money to fund their programs and connect veterans to healthcare, education, housing, and employment services. Program funding issues include but are not limited to training for staff, hiring staff, and money to implement services. Where providing services to veterans might normally be fiscally challenging, California's tight budgetary constraints make it more so. Participants' suggestions about creative partnerships to seek funding for veterans' services as well as identifying and applying for grants may swell the funding streams to higher than current levels. Creating and publicizing comprehensive lists of funding sources may be an important first step toward meeting funding needs.

Alternative ways to streamline funding include establishing more one-stop shops. The map CRB provided at the Conference from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of the Actuary, illustrates locations where veterans reside in California and may be updated to reflect known centers for homeless veterans as well as to identify the geographic locations of service providers. The pinpointed locations may indicate good places for one-stop shops.

CONCLUSION

Our goal of this white paper is to provide the ICV with options based on systematically collected and analyzed data. We strongly encourage the ICV to engage both its staff and research organizations, including CRB, in exploring options for helping veterans in California. The ICV has many experts numbered in the conference participant list. We encourage the ICV to reach out to these experts for information about refining, refocusing, and developing better services for veterans and to connect veterans with services that address their needs.