



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
VETERANS SERVICES STRATEGIC PLAN
ADVISORY COMMITTEE



Official Minutes of the Veterans Services Strategic Plan Advisory Committee

Meeting Date and Time: January 8, 2015 @ 9:00 a.m.
 Meeting Location: DHS Field Office
 249 Roosevelt Street
 Pawtucket, RI

MEMBERS PRESENT	MEMBERS ABSENT
Corrine Russo, Deputy Director, Department of Human Services	Division of Planning
Kim Ripoli, Co-Chair, Associate Director, Division of Veterans Affairs	Rhode Island Board Of Education
Corrina Roy, on behalf of Director Craig Stenning, Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals	Department of Health
Elizabeth Dwyer, Associate Director, on behalf of Director Paul McGreevey, Department of Business Regulation	Division of Elderly Affairs
James White, on behalf of Director Charles Fogarty, Department of Labor and Training	Secretary of State
LTC Ken Niles and LTC Robert Hayden, on behalf of The Adjutant General, MG Kevin McBride	Commerce RI
Ryan Stys, on behalf of Peter Kilmartin, Attorney General, Department of the Attorney General	
Also in attendance: Michael Jolin and Dan Evangelista	

1. Call to Order

Associate Director of Veterans Affairs Kim Ripoli called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Those present introduced themselves. A motion was made to approve the minutes of the December 6, 2014 meeting. It passed without objection.

Attending the meeting was LTC Robert Hayden. LTC Hayden will be replacing LTC Kenneth Niles, who has been assigned to a new position within the RI National Guard.

2. Continuing our SOAR

Dr. Gene Knott and Deborah Mathews from URI continued leading the group about the strategic planning process. The committee reviewed the Core Values handout that was developed at the December meeting. Working from the SOAR handout, the committee focused on the Opportunities and Aspiration sections. Regarding the Opportunities part of SOAR, Dr. Knott recommended the committee think in terms of provocative propositions and ideas outside the normal framework.

We turned our attention to the “Identified Strengths for VSSP” handout that listed the strengths identified at the December meeting. With an eye toward the committee’s statutory mandate, the targets set were discussed.

The committee then went into a breakout session. There were three groups of four. Each group had a moderator, a time monitor, and a message person, who summarized the discussion of the respective groups. This segment of the meeting was dedicated to the question of opportunity(ies). The groups looked at our Strengths, Core Values, and the nine Strategic Goals established for the committee to determine what we want to be known for, who we will serve, and the challenges we will probably face.

We reported out on the group discussions and Dr. Knott noted that amongst the three groups there were different discussion directions. Group one spoke about the Veterans Home in Bristol and the Veterans Cemetery in Exeter being well known here in RI. The group highlighted the Providence VA Medical Center and how it does a very good job in delivering services. The group believed that the favorable action of both the governor and the General Assembly to veteran issues will assist in the overcoming any challenges that could be a stopgap. James White mentioned that having one centralized location for all veteran’s services and benefits would be a boon to VSSP and Rhode Island’s veterans.

Group two agreed with the Veterans Home and Cemetery being well known in RI but suggested that the notion of a comprehensive Resource Center would and could be a highlight here in RI. As for stakeholders, it mentioned families of the veteran, taxpayers, and the citizens as being important, but that the Governor’s Office should be the spark. The challenges faced have to do with the education and skills gap we suffer here in RI. The group stressed the need for a better educated workforce and jobs for our graduates of college and technical schools.

Group three also thought the state is best known for our Veterans Home and Cemetery and emphasized SMVF (Service Members, Veterans and Families). This group mentioned the importance of the Post-9/11 GI Bill for Education and how it can benefit the veteran’s education or be transferred to a family member. The stakeholders highlighted included members of the General Assembly, the RI Departments of Education and Taxation. The group felt that passing legislation which did away with taxation on military and social security benefits would help immensely.

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Director Russo mentioned how important it is to educate the public and better inform veterans on what is available for benefits and services. She endorsed the concept of a Resource Center.

There was a discussion of the Division's means of communicating to the veteran community. All agreed that resourcing a better marketing program would assist the Division with getting better known.

At this point Dr. Knott directed us to the Aspirations part of the SOAR handout. He wanted us to review the "Why We Are Here?" and discuss a "narrowing of the focus." He stated that this next phase is where we start to build vehicles for the different agencies and their services. He felt that the nine strategic goals in the statute can probably be grouped into a few broader categories.

The committee formed into three groups again to discuss the Aspirations piece of SOAR. This session required the groups to state how we can accomplish the goals in the shortest period of time, what goals are the most salient, and what vehicle could be used to achieve the objective(s) of the VSSP.

The groups reported out with greater and more simplified "access to benefits" being the number one goal. It was recommended that this could be accomplished with a fully-funded, fully-staffed Resource Center(s). Dr. Knott again talked about melding some of the goals together. For example, educational attainment and job skills training could fall under the same umbrella.

The objective of connecting veterans and their families to important services and benefits was agreed by the committee to be paramount. It was also agreed that outreach would be an important vehicle to accomplish this goal.

3. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m. The next VSSP Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 22, 2015. It will be held at the Department of Human Services Central Office, 1st Floor Conference Room, 57 Howard Avenue, Cranston, RI.