

VETERANS SERVICES



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SUMMARY

The 2019-2020 Calaveras County Grand Jury investigated the resources available at the Veterans Services Office in Valley Springs pursuant to Penal Code §925. The investigation revealed that Calaveras County veterans do receive competent services including assistance in filling out applications, referrals to appropriate resources, help with solving problems with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and follow-ups to make sure the veteran receives the proper services. The investigation also revealed the need for an outreach office in Angels Camp.

GLOSSARY

BOS – Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
CCGJ – Calaveras County Grand Jury
HHS – Calaveras County Health & Human Services
VA – United States Department of Veterans Affairs
VSO – Calaveras County Veterans Services Office

METHODOLOGY

The CCGJ interviewed a staff member of the VSO to ascertain the function of that office. Veterans were interviewed to gather information as to the quality given and satisfaction with the services received. Statistics were also gathered which showed the number of veterans in the county and the number and percentage of veterans served by the VSO. A site visit to the Angels Camp Veterans Memorial District Office was also made, and a staff member was interviewed.

BACKGROUND

The VSO is a County office established by the BOS to assist veterans, their dependents and survivors, and the general public in obtaining services from federal, state, and local agencies administering programs for veterans, including death benefits.

The VSO was established in the mid 1940's and operated as a division of HHS, at the HHS offices in San Andreas. In 2018 it became a separate County department, and a veteran services officer was hired to administer the program. In December 2018, the VSO moved to the Jenny Lind Veterans Memorial Hall in Valley Springs.

DISCUSSION

VSO staff is available weekdays to make sure veterans receive necessary services. Veterans can make an appointment, or walk-in visits are also an option. Currently, there are 1.5 trained outreach staff who will go to the home if a veteran is unable to go to the office.

The intake/registration process at the VSO is as follows:

- Staff determines the services needed via an interview, which can take anywhere from ten minutes to several hours.

- Once the needed services are identified, the staff ensures all paperwork is correctly submitted to the appropriate agency.
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- If the veteran needs in-home care, staff will assist with applying for services such as MediCal and the In-Home Support Services (IHSS) program. Staff will also seek temporary housing for local homeless veterans through the VA office in Palo Alto.
- The VSO does not provide transportation to its office or to any of the services needed by the veteran. Instead, they partner with Common Ground Senior Services, a local non-profit, which provides transportation throughout Calaveras County. If a veteran does not have access to email, staff will communicate either by mail or by telephone. According to the Angels Camp Memorial District staff, a field office could be made available for VSO services in order to serve the Highway 4 corridor.

If a veteran does not qualify for the services needed through the VA, staff will provide information about appropriate resources and offer assistance if necessary. The VSO does not provide legal advice.

An official at the VSO stated that they serve between 1,500 - 2,000 veterans. According to the 2018 census there are a total of 4,511 veterans in the County (4,308 are male and 203 are female.) There are over 1.5 million veterans in California and 18.8 million veterans in the United States.

The VSO budget for the 2019-2020 fiscal year is approximately \$215,000. Eighty percent of the funding comes from the Calaveras County general fund. The remaining funds are provided by grants from the State of California. The VSO does not receive any federal funding. Until the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the VSO budget had been included in the HHS budget. Beginning in fiscal year 2020-2021, the VSO budget will be a separate line item. This will be the first opportunity for the VSO's Executive Services Officer to present a requested budget to the BOS which includes sufficient funding for three full-time employees. Additionally, an in-person presentation detailing the function and value of the VSO could be made to the BOS.

The VSO is staffed with one full-time Executive Services Officer, one part-time outreach employee, and one part-time clerical employee. The volume of veteran need in Calaveras County is greater than the current staffing levels can fulfill. This results in a delayed response to messages left with the office, and limited access to services for veterans living in areas such as the Highway 4 corridor and the northern region of the County. The VSO is also currently operating without a policy and procedure manual.

As of June 1, 2020, the VSO staff has two part time clerical positions which are funded by federal funds through Motherlode Job Training. These positions are due to end September 30, 2020. Having these two positions has improved the efficiency of the VSO.

As of July 1, 2020, the VSO has a 3/4 time Outreach Coordinator funded by the Mental Health Services Act. This position will exist as long as funding is available. This staff person will enable the VSO to go out into the community and see clients who are unable to come to the office.

Below is a chart showing the percent of how many veterans in Calaveras County were served from 2015 to 2019.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total # of Veterans in Calaveras County	4,760	4,322	4,350	3,950	4,063
# of Veterans Served	238	389	261	158	772
% of Veterans Served in Calaveras County	5	9	6	4	19

The following are the reasons why the figures have fluctuated:

- In March 2015, the agency started to keep track of the statistics in the above table.
- In July 2016, there was a dedicated staff member to interview veterans.
- In 2017, there was one shared interview room between HHS and VSO, limiting interview availability. Additionally, the dedicated staff member retired.
- In 2018 from January through May there was no outreach person to visit veterans, therefore, services were limited to office visits only. This position was filled in June 2018.
- In December 2018 the VSO moved to a new location in Valley Springs. The office has two interview rooms and is staffed with an outreach employee and a part-time clerical employee.

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONDENTS

Pursuant to Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses within 60 days from elected county official(s) and within 90 days from governing bodies. In order to be included and published in the next Grand Jury report, invited responses must be received within 90 days.

After conducting interviews, touring a facility, and reviewing reference documents, the Grand Jury Findings are as follows:

F1. As of Aug 2019, the VSO staffing levels limited veteran access to available services. As of June 1, 2020, two part time clerical positions were added which enables the office to run efficiently. These federally funded jobs will end on September 30, 2020. As of July 1, 2020, an Outreach Coordinator was hired.

R1. The CCGJ recommends the VSO to seek permanent County funding for the clerical positions.

Required Responses:

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses:

- Executive Services Officer of the VSO

F2. Without a written policy and procedure manual there is a lack of clearly-defined operating processes in the event of personnel changes.

R2. The CCGJ recommends that the VSO establish a written policy and procedures manual by June 30, 2021.

Required Responses:

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses:

- Executive Services Officer of the VSO

F3. Information pertaining to the services of the VSO is limited when veterans cannot access the internet or live in remote regions of the County.

R3. The CCGJ recommends the VSO continue to send information regarding veteran services and events to the County library branches, community centers, churches, and merchants, for posting in a public space.

Required Responses:

- None

Invited Responses:

- Executive Services Officer of the VSO

F4. It can be challenging for veterans living outside the Valley Springs/western Calaveras area to visit the VSO.

R4. The CCGJ recommends that the VSO consider partnering with other Veterans Memorial Districts, including Angels Camp and libraries to provide outreach services with regular office hours, in those areas.

Required Responses:

- None

Invited Responses:

- Executive Services Officer of the VSO

REFERENCE SOURCES

- U.S. Census 2018 5-year survey
- Statista Research Department, April 29, 2019([statista.com/topics/1279/veterans](https://www.statista.com/topics/1279/veterans))
- Statistics from Veterans Services Office 2020

DISCLAIMER

This report was issued by the Calaveras County Grand Jury with the exception of one Juror who recused themselves. This Grand Juror was excluded from all parts of the investigation, including interviews, deliberations, and the writing and approval of this report.

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.