

Veterans Retraining Assistance Program Policy

Reference:

TEGL 8-12, Change 1.

Background:

The Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) Act (Title II of Pub. L. 112-56), signed into law on November 21, 2011, established the Veterans Retraining Assistance Policy (VRAP). Under the VRAP, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), pays up to 12 months of retraining assistance to unemployed, eligible veterans aged 35 to 60 who participate in training programs for “high demand” occupations. Eligibility is jointly determined by USDOL and VA. The “high demand” occupations list is a national list, as determined by USDOL Office of Employment and Training (ETA), using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and is available at: http://benefits.va.gov/vow/docs/VRAP_High_Demand.pdf.

VRAP has accepted the full complement of applications to enroll 45,000 veterans in Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, from July 1, 2012 through September 30, 2012; up to an additional 54,000 veterans may enroll from October 1, 2012 through October 1, 2013, with training concluding by March 31, 2014. The VA will continue accepting applications and issuing certificates of eligibility until 99,000 applicants are enrolled in training. The training slots will be paid on a first come first serve basis until the maximum of 99,000 participants enrolled in training is reached.

The purpose of this policy is to establish the required process for providing outreach to, and tracking outcomes of, VRAP participants. This policy includes procedures for American Job Center staff to offer VRAP participants employment and partner services upon program completion or termination as required by the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011.

Action:

After the 10 day public review period, this policy is considered final. Questions and comments should be submitted in writing to Jan Fox, Policy Coordinator, jan.fox@nebraska.gov.

Policy:

Overview of VRAP

In order to qualify for retraining assistance, a veteran must satisfy the following eligibility criteria:

- Be at least 35 but not more than 60 years old, at the time of application
- Be unemployed on the date of application
- Not be enrolled in any Federal or state job-training program at any time during the previous 180-day period as of the application date
- Be in receipt of an other than dishonorable discharge from the last period of active duty service in the armed forces

- Not be eligible for any other VA educational assistance
- Not be in receipt of VA compensation for a service-connected disability rated totally disabling by reason of unemployability
- Submit an application no later than October 1, 2013

Acceptance of applications began on May 15, 2012, and concluded October 1, 2013. The application is a joint VA/USDOL electronic application which can be accessed from the VOW to Hire Heroes Act Web site at: <http://benefits.va.gov/vow>. USDOL and VA are each responsible for determining eligibility based on specific criteria. Veterans apply for the program by signing into their VA Veterans Online Application (VONAPP at: <http://www.gibill.va.gov/apply-for-benefits/application/>) or by registering for a new account. Once the participant has selected the VRAP application, he or she will first answer questions pertaining to USDOL's eligibility requirements: age, unemployment status, and previous enrollment in a Federal or state job-training program in the past 180-days. The veteran then affirms that the statements he or she made are true and correct. After the veteran submits this information, USDOL will determine whether the applicant is initially eligible or ineligible for the VRAP based on the information provided in the applicant's self-attestation. If determined ineligible, the veteran will receive a system generated letter (on the screen and printable) explaining the reason for his or her ineligibility and informing him or her of the right to appeal. The letter also refers the veteran to the nearest American Job Center by calling 1-877-US2-JOBS (1-877-872-5627) toll free, or by going to the America's Service Locator Web site (www.servicelocator.org). A veteran can reapply for the program if he or she believes he or she answered a question incorrectly or if the circumstances that resulted in ineligibility changed.

If the veteran is determined initially eligible under USDOL requirements, he or she will continue the application so that VA can conduct its eligibility determination. VA will determine eligibility by ensuring the applicant: received an other than dishonorable discharge from the last period of active duty service in the armed forces; is not eligible for any other VA educational assistance; and, is not in receipt of VA compensation for a service-connected disability rated totally disabling by reason of unemployability. The veteran will also indicate the "high demand" occupation in which he or she is applying for training. As part of the VA application process, the veteran will need to have bank routing and account information in order to complete the application. If the veteran is determined eligible based on the information submitted, he or she will receive a system generated letter in the mail informing him or her of the next steps to utilize the benefit. If determined ineligible by VA, the applicant will receive an individual letter indicating the specific reasons for denial and appeal rights. Veterans with questions regarding the status of their applications may send an electronic inquiry on the VA Web site, (<http://www.gibill.va.gov>) or contact the VA Education Call Center at 1-888-GIBILL-1 (1-888-442-4551).

After being determined eligible by USDOL and the VA, the veteran is able to receive a VRAP stipend from VA for up to 12 months to participate in a full-time training program for a "high demand" occupation offered by a community college or technical school. Once the application is approved by USDOL and the VA, the training may begin. The veteran will need to enroll in the training program.

The school certifying official must verify each veteran's enrollment by providing an enrollment certification form to VA. The veteran will then receive a monthly educational assistance stipend paid directly to the student (\$1,564 per month as of October 1, 2012, this amount is updated every October 1st through a cost of living adjustment). The training program must lead to an associate degree or a certificate (or other similar evidence of the completion of the program of education or training) leading to a "high demand" occupation. In certain situations, VA has made available an Advance Payment option to enable VRAP participants to obtain funding prior to the start of their

programs. For more information on the Advance Payment option, as well as other frequently asked questions please visit: <https://gibill.custhelp.com/app/answers/list/kw/vrap>.

VRAP Participant Outreach

On a weekly basis, the Nebraska Department of Labor, Office of Employment and Training (OET) will receive a Participant Data File from the VA. The OET Veterans Program Coordinator will forward to the appropriate American Job Center the Participant Data File containing information on VRAP exiters from their area. Once the American Job Center contact receives the Participant Data File, they will coordinate the VRAP outreach effort. An outreach attempt is considered any of the following:

- physical letter sent to participant
- phone call to participant
- email sent to participant
- NEworks (through the message center)

If contact with the VRAP participant is made, staff should encourage the individual to utilize the American Job Center resources that provide employment services and registration into NEworks (Nebraska's Management Information System). American Job Centers may wish to contact the VRAP participant earlier than when they exit the program to offer case management or other American Job Center assistance while they are in training or before they begin training.

In instances where the initial outreach attempt is not successful, a minimum of two additional attempts are to be made within the 30-day period after the VRAP participant completed or terminated training; after the third failed attempt, no further outreach is required. If contact using one of the methods (e.g. phone call) is not successful, American Job Center staff are encouraged to attempt using alternative methods (e.g. email or physical letter).

VRAP Outreach Reporting

In order to ensure partner and employment services are offered to every participant, it is necessary to document the results of each participant outreach contact. On a monthly basis, the American Job Center contact will submit to the OET Veterans Program Coordinator an updated Participant Data File documenting the outreach efforts conducted. The updated Participant Data File is due to the OET Veterans Program Coordinator **no later than the 5th of the month**. The first report is due November 5, 2013 for the month of October. Monthly reporting will go through April 30, 2014, with the final report due May 5, 2014.

American Job Center staff are required to complete columns O, P, Q and R of the Participant Data File on a monthly basis. (Attachment A of this policy identifies and describes each required data field of the Participant Data File and provides an example of the spreadsheet used for reporting.) Reports are due to the OET Veterans Program Coordinator **on the 5th of every month for the period of the calendar month prior**. The OET Veterans Program Coordinator will email each American Job Center contact weekly, with updates of any VRAP participants that have exited the program. The American Job Center staff are to make at least three attempts to contact the VRAP participant. (Attachment A provides three rows for each exited participant, to allow for three contact attempts if necessary, as stated and required in TEGl 8-12, Change 1.) All VRAP training will be completed by March 31, 2014; reporting will continue through May 5, 2014, or as required.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING COLUMNS O, P, Q AND R:

Column "O" – Notification Weeks:

This is the number of weeks remaining to contact the VRAP participant to offer employment services within the required 30-day period. (*Note* – This will countdown from each week starting at "4")

Column "P" – Employment Assistance:

Enter one of the options 1 through 5 indicating the appropriate employment assistance response.

- 1. *Contact made, participant already found employment:*** In this scenario, the participant may not want/need additional services as he or she has already found employment. However, since this individual will not be a new registrant in the Wagner-Peyser program, this outcome will not be counted for workforce system performance purposes, but it will need to be tracked for documenting outreach and reporting for VRAP.
- 2. *Contact made, participant is not seeking further assistance:*** If a participant is not willing to participate in additional follow-up services or refuses to register for Wagner-Peyser services then this outcome will not count for performance purposes but will need to be tracked for documenting outreach and reporting for VRAP. Note that services cannot be denied if the VRAP participant refuses to register for Wagner-Peyser.
- 3. *Contact cannot be made:*** After three attempts to contact the VRAP participant within the specified 30 day timeframe, if no contact is made, the VRAP participant will be deemed "non-responsive." The individual will be excluded for performance purposes but documentation of outreach to the VRAP participant will need to be tracked.
- 4. *Contact made, participant looking for a job/requests further assistance:*** All attempts should be made to encourage the VRAP participant to go to the American Job Center, or to sign-up for Wagner-Peyser services virtually. This will allow staff the ability to serve and track the participant, and it will also greatly aid in reporting performance outcomes.
- 5. *Contact made, result is other than scenarios listed above:*** There are possible situations where a VRAP participant may be contacted and one of the scenarios above did not occur. If the participant was contacted and the result was something other than the four scenarios listed above, that scenario will be tracked, i.e. referral to other services such as Voc Rehab, Community Action Agency, etc. If the VRAP participant is registered in NEworks, staff are to use the partner referral process in NEworks to document the referral.

Column "Q" – Date Contacted:

Enter the date the VRAP participant was contacted.

Column "R" – Method of Contact:

Letter, phone, email, NEworks (through the message center) or other as referenced in "VRAP Participant Outreach."

VRAP Participant Wagner-Peyser Reporting

Upon receiving a VRAP referral, Wagner-Peyser staff should first query NEworks using the participant's name, date of birth, address, state, zip code, phone number, and email provided in the file to determine if the participant is currently enrolled in Wagner-Peyser or WIA. If an open Wagner-Peyser application exists in the participant record, activity code 010, Special Program Identifier VRAP, should be recorded in the Wagner-Peyser activity table along with any other employment

services that are provided. The special identifier must be present in VRAP participant records to accurately report data in the ETA 9002A-F and Vets 200A-C federal reports.

For reporting purposes, an individual is only considered a VRAP participant once they have entered training. Individuals should only receive the "VRAP" special program identifier if they have been confirmed to be in training (e.g., an individual is currently in VRAP training and seeks employment assistance from an American Job Center, an American Job Center Staff member helped a VRAP participant enroll in training and the VRAP participant has been confirmed in training, or the VRAP participant is identified in the data file of VRAP participants sent by the OET Veterans Program Coordinator to an American Job Center). In the event that a VRAP participant is also an Emergency Unemployment Compensation (EUC) claimant with "REUC" flagged in their Special Program Identifier field, the participant will be flagged as "VRUC" in the data validation file. This will allow for full reporting on the VRAP as well as the EUC services required by the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 and extended through 2013 in the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012.

Attachment A Participant Data File

The Nebraska Department of Labor, Office of Employment and Training (OET) will distribute this Participant Data File to the American Job Center for outreach services based on VRAP participants who exited the program. This attachment identifies each data field and provides a quick explanation of what the field is. The highlighted (grey) columns are the portions to be updated by the American Job Center and returned to the OET Veterans Program Coordinator **no later than the 5th of the month**. The first report is due November 5, 2013 for the month of October. Monthly reporting will go through April 30, 2014, with the final report due May 5, 2014.

<u>Column</u>	<u>Column Name And Explanation</u>
A	First Name – This is the First Name of the VRAP participant.
B	Middle Name – This is the Middle Name of the VRAP participant (if applicable).
C	Last Name – This is the Last Name of the VRAP participant.
D	DOB – This is the Date of Birth (DOB) of the VRAP participant (e.g. 1/1/1960).
E	Email Address – This is the email address provided by the VRAP participant on their application (<i>Note</i> – This is a required field to complete the application, so every participant should have an email address).
F	Phone – This is the phone number provided by the VRAP participant on their application.
G	High Demand Occupation – This is the occupation chosen by the VRAP participant in which he or she will receive training.
H	Address – This is the address provided by the VRAP participant on their application
I	State – This is the state of residence provided by the VRAP participant on their application.
J	Zip code – This is the zip code provided by the VRAP participant on their application.
K	Name of Training Facility – This is the educational institution in which the VRAP participant received training.
L	Course Name – This is the educational program the VRAP participant was trained in (<i>Note</i> – This may be the course taken, the credential being pursued, or the program in which they are enrolled).
M	Objective Name – This is the educational credential the VRAP participant has completed or terminated from (<i>Note</i> – This can be an Associate’s degree or other educational program).
N	DOL-Unique ID – This is a unique VRAP participant identifier (ID) established by the Department of Labor (USDOL) (<i>Note</i> – It is not personally identifiable information)
O	Notification Weeks – This is the number of weeks remaining to contact the VRAP participant to offer employment services within the required 30-day period. (<i>Note</i> – This will countdown from each week starting at “4”)
P	Employment Assistance – Indicate either 1 through 5 per the NDOL policy Page 4 Section "VRAP Participant Outreach – Instructions for Completing O, P, Q and R."
Q	Date Contacted – Enter the date the VRAP Exiter was contacted.
R	Method of Contact - Phone, letter, email, NEworks or other referenced on Page 3, Section "Outreach for All VRAP Participants."

Attachment A (Continued) Participant Data File

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
1	First Name	Middle Name	Last Name	DOB	Email Address	Phone	High Demand Occupation	Address	State	Zip Code	Name of Training Facility	Course Name	Objective Name	DOL Unique Identifier	Notification Weeks	Employment Assistance	Date Contacted	Method of Contact
2																		
3																		
4																		
5																		
6																		
7																		
8																		
9																		
10																		
11																		
12																		
13																		
14																		
15																		
16																		
17																		
18																		
19																		
20																		
21																		
22																		
23																		