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Chapter 4 ADVISORY COMMITTEES

4.01 Introduction

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Service consults with advisory committees in developing policy, procedures and services. This chapter will discuss three of the most commonly utilized committees to include the Vocational Rehabilitation Panel (VRP), the Field Advisory Committee (FAC), and the Veterans' Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation (VACOR). This chapter contains the following information in regard to each advisory committee:

- Overview
- Purpose
- Members
- Roles and responsibilities

4.02 References and Resources

Laws: 38 U.S. Code (U.S.C.) 529
 38 U.S.C. 3121
 Federal Advisory Committee Act

Regulations: 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 21.60
 38 CFR 21.62
 38 CFR 21.400
 38 CFR 21.402

4.03 Vocational Rehabilitation Panel (VRP)

a. Overview of the VRP

The VRP serves as a consultative body in rehabilitation planning for Veterans with disability(ies), their dependents, or other complex cases whose circumstances require interdisciplinary consideration, as outlined in 38 CFR 21.60 and 38 CFR 21.62. The VRP assists in the evaluation and planning process by reviewing referred cases and submitting a report with recommendations and information for planning rehabilitation services.

b. Purpose of the VRP

The VRP consults with case managers on the following cases:

- Veterans who have a serious employment handicap (SEH)
- Veterans who may benefit from an Independent Living (IL) program because it is not currently reasonably feasible to pursue suitable employment

VRP recommendations and suggestions are considered expert technical assistance to facilitate the planning and decision-making process. Recommendations and suggestions are not binding, but cannot be disregarded without thorough consideration and documentation.

c. Members of the VRP

The VRP includes a wide range of rehabilitation professionals to assure interdisciplinary expertise is available for the review of each referred case. Membership on the VRP is limited to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) staff members. The VRP includes, but is not limited to:

- A Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC), appointed by the VR&E Officer, serves as chairperson for the coordination of meetings, writing of reports, and expert knowledge of VR&E services
- A VRC, who is usually the referring VRC, for expert knowledge of the specific case
- A medical consultant for an expert opinion on medical issues
- A mental health provider for expert opinion on mental health issues

A case may be referred to the VRP by a VRC or the VR&E Officer.

d. Roles and Responsibilities of the VRP

The VRP has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Reviews each referred case in relation to the specific reason for the referral and any other problem area identified in the course of its consideration of the case

- Prepares a written report of recommendations on each case with a summary of the VRP's deliberations and recommendations

4.04 The Field Advisory Committee (FAC)

a. Overview of the FAC

The FAC serves as the primary source through which the Director of VR&E Service solicits input from field staff on a variety of issues impacting the VR&E Program. The overall objective is to improve the quality of service to Veterans.

b. Purpose of the FAC

The FAC functions as a resource for providing feedback to the Director of VR&E Service on barriers to effective service delivery emerging in the field. The scope of activities is generally limited to preparing for and executing action items identified in quarterly meetings. All members of the FAC serve at the discretion of the Director of VR&E Service with approval from the Office of Field Operations.

c. Members of the FAC

The FAC includes two VR&E Officers from the Central, Eastern, Southern and Western Areas. The Director of VR&E Service appoints one member to serve as Chairman, and one VR&E Service employee serves as liaison to the FAC.

d. Roles and Responsibilities of the FAC

The FAC has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Conducts meetings once per quarter
- Provides advice and counsel to the Director of VR&E Service
- Assists in the analysis of issues impacting VR&E
- Provides recommendations on possible solutions to challenges facing the VR&E Program
- Provides to the Director of VR&E Service a verbal briefing and a copy of the meeting minutes to summarize significant discussions, recommendations and action items

- Brings emerging field issues to the attention of VR&E Service Management

4.05 Veterans' Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation (VACOR)

a. Overview of VACOR

VACOR is authorized by 38 U.S.C. 3121 and operates under the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act. VACOR consults with and advises the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on the administration of Veterans' rehabilitation programs under 38 U.S.C. The findings of VACOR are incorporated in the Secretary's annual report submitted to Congress under 38 U.S.C. 529. Further guidance on VACOR is outlined in 38 CFR 21.400 and CFR 21.402.

b. Purpose of VACOR

VACOR submits a yearly report to the Secretary on rehabilitation programs and activities provided to Veterans. The report must include an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of Veterans and a review of programs and activities designed to meet such needs.

c. Members of VACOR

VACOR includes the following members who are appointed by the Secretary:

- A Designated Federal Officer (DFO)
- Veterans with service-connected disabilities
- Experts in the field of rehabilitation medicine
- Experts in the field of vocational guidance
- Experts in the field of vocational rehabilitation
- Experts in the field of employment and training

One member will also be appointed from each the following agencies for their knowledge on the administration of Veterans' rehabilitation programs under 38 U.S.C.:

- VA, Veterans Health Administration

- VA, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)
- Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration
- Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research
- Department of Labor, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Veterans Employment and Training Service

d. Roles and Responsibilities of VACOR

VACOR has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Meets two times per year
- Assesses the rehabilitation needs of Veterans
- Reviews VA programs and activities to meet those needs
- Submits a yearly report to the Secretary
- Performs specific projects and assignments as necessary and consistent with its purpose

VBA specifically is responsible for providing support to VACOR. A DFO who is a full-time VA employee will approve the schedule and agenda of VACOR meetings.