



**Veterans Administration Voluntary Services (VAVS)
Representative & Deputy**

TRAINING GUIDE



National Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc.

**Anne Parker
National VAWS Representative**

Source for much of this information is the VHA Handbook 1620.1 Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration, Washington D.C

ABOUT THIS TRAINING GUIDE

The purpose of this Guide is to provide practical information on how to perform successfully as a VAVS Representative [Reps] or Deputy (Depts). Although general in nature, this information should be shared with all of our Blue Star Mothers. The information will be helpful to your Representatives and Deputies as they perform their duties.

If you have specific questions, you are encouraged to contact Anne Parker, BSMA VAVS Director. As a Representative or Deputy, you have a responsibility to be knowledgeable about the rule, policies and programs of the National Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc. and the Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service. This information is provided to help you acquire this knowledge. Please take time to visit www.bluestarmothers.org and read about the VAVS program as well as watch the short PowerPoint presentation.

I. The VAVS Program

The Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) Program, under the management of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), provides for community participation in the VA Program of Care and Treatment of Veteran patients.

Through this program, Blue Star Mother volunteer efforts and resources are combined to serve America's Veterans and their families with dignity and compassion. As a VAVS you will have the opportunity to use your skills, enthusiasm, compassion and personality.

II. Goals:

The VAVS goals are to:

Ensure that the Representative and Deputy are supportive of the VA's mission.

Ensure all volunteers are informed of the VA's primary responsibilities.

Provide a working environment that is safe, clean and comfortable.

Promote cooperation among employees and volunteers.

Earn the respect and gratitude of those served.

Ensure volunteers are given assignments that provide satisfaction, utilize knowledge and skills and offer opportunities for learning.

Maintain a volunteer recognition system to ensure that volunteers are appropriately recognized.

Maintain interaction of volunteers with patients in ways that foster the healing process.

Ensure that all volunteers serve under the supervision of VA compensated employees in authorized assignments, which meet identified needs.

Ensure that participation in the VAVS Program does not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, non-disqualifying handicap and national origin.

III. National VAVS Advisory Committee

The VAVS National Advisory Committee (NAC) was established by VA Circular No: 117, dated May 17, 1946 and became a federally chartered advisory committee on February 5, 1975.

The committee advises the Undersecretary for Health on matters pertaining to the participation of volunteers in VA medical facilities. Committee membership is open to all national organizations that provide volunteers or donations to VA medical facilities and meet or exceed minimum criteria established by the NAC.

Service member” (voting) must maintain the provision of volunteers and VA recognized participation on local VAVS committees at a minimum of thirty VA facilities
Each medical center has a VAVS committee made up of organizations whose members participate at the local level in the VAVS program for Veteran patients. Each organization may certify one Representative and one Deputy to the medical center’s VAVS committee.

IV. Medical Center VAVS Committee

The actual certification of the BSMA VAVS representatives and deputies is done by our National BSMA VAVS.

BSMA members may be removed when not is in attendance for at least three consecutive meetings. Membership though, can be renewed with a letter of certification to the facility director indicating that the attendance requirement “will” be met.

The VAVS committee serves first in an advisory capacity to medical center management in coordinating on a local level, the established plans and policies for volunteer participation of the committee’s respective organizations, chapters, departments and resources in the VAVS program. Each member of the committee will keep medical center management advised about their organization’s policies and procedures for volunteer assistance and will provide guidance within their membership for appropriate participation in the VAVS program.

The only acceptable excused absence is attendance at the BSMA Annual Convention.

V. Qualifications for VAVS Representatives:

The caliber of participation by an organization in the VAVS Program can be largely judged by the caliber of leadership provided by its VAVS Representative. The following qualifications have been suggested by National BSMA VAVS:

1. Willing and able to participate in the orientation provided by the Voluntary Service Officer.
2. Physically capable of performing regularly schedules (RS) hours of service and have a source of transportation.
3. The ability to attend committee meetings regularly. If BSMA is not represented by a Representative or a Deputy Representative at three consecutive meetings, BSMA may be dropped from the VAVS Committee.
4. The ability to recruit volunteers of all ages, both from BSMA membership and the community at large.
5. The ability to work effectively with members of his or her own organization, with representatives from other organizations on the VAVS Committee and with VA staff.
6. A genuine desire to serve on the VAVS Committee and a full realization of his or her responsibility and the work to be done.

VI. VAVS Representatives’ and Deputies’ Responsibilities:

VAVS Representatives will be responsible for the following functions:

Recruitment of Volunteers:

Coordination of the volunteer resource of NBSMA and all aspects of their participation in the VAVS Program at the medical center.

Interpretation of policies and procedures of BSMA to the VAVS Committee and appropriate VA staff.

Annual evaluation of BSMA participation in the VAVS Program with the leadership of BSMA and the VA. (Annual Joint Review scheduled with the Chief of Volunteer Services or Program Manager).

Establishment of procedures for keeping all participating elements of BSMA informed of ongoing medical center programs and needs.

BSMA may have up to three deputy representatives to share the duties of the representative. Their responsibilities include:

Attending VAVS Committee meetings in the absence of the representative.

Attending meetings with the VAVS Representative in order to be fully knowledgeable of the work of the committee and to be able to represent BSMA effectively when the representative is unable to attend.

Report back to chapters with events, donations needed and opportunities to serve with their local facilities.

VII. General Information

- a. Recruitment of volunteers is “the” most important responsibility of an BSMA VAVS Representative and is to be accomplished through your Chapter and/or Department.
 1. Representatives may invite VA staff to BSMA meetings to discuss the volunteer program and assist in recruitment. BSMA leadership may attend VAVS meetings, medical center briefings and tours to better understand the VAVS Program.
 2. VA staff members may effectively assist you in planning your recruitment by determining worthwhile volunteer assignments, preparing effective volunteer assignment guides and utilizing the media to enhance the recruitment efforts for both BSMA members and non-members.
 3. Voluntary Service Staff is available to discuss Representatives new recruitment methods and techniques, effective utilization of medical center services and effective use of the media.
- b. Classification of Volunteers:
 1. Regularly Scheduled (RS) volunteers are individuals who participate in the VAVS Program on a regularly scheduled assignment under VA supervision. A formal orientation is required and in some medical center a TB test is required. These volunteers are considered “without compensation” employees. Their hours are recorded and awards may be presented according to the number of service hours volunteered.
 2. All other volunteers, serving either through BSMA or independently, are designated Occasional Volunteers. BSMA receives credit for service given rather than individually as (RS) volunteers. No individual records are maintained for occasional volunteers.
 3. Student volunteers under the age of 18, but over 14 or those that satisfy the state’s definition of underage, must have written parental or guardian approval to participate in the VAVS Program and authorization for diagnostic and emergency treatment if injured while volunteering.
- c. Training of Volunteers:
 1. The Voluntary Service Office is responsible for providing general user-friendly orientation to regularly scheduled volunteers about the role of the VAVS Program,

including policies and procedures, eg: the Privacy Act, infection control, fire and safety, etc.

2. Additional orientation in the specific assignment to which the volunteer has been assigned, and necessary on-the-job instruction will be provided by the assignment supervisor.

NOTE: Every effort should be made to ensure volunteers have access to orientation and assignments that accommodate their schedules.

d. Supervision of Volunteers:

The Regular Scheduled (RS) volunteer receives multiple, but not conflicting, supervision.

1. First there is supervision exercised by the VAVS Representative of BSMA .
2. Second general supervision must also be maintained by the Voluntary Service staff.
3. Finally, there is supervision by VA staff in the work assignment area.

e. Recognition of Volunteers:

1. Every April, during National Volunteer Week, each VAMC normally sponsors a Volunteer Recognition and Awards Ceremony at which a variety of awards are presented to eligible volunteers. Awards are based on the number of cumulative hours each award recipient has served through the preceding fiscal year.

f. Volunteer Benefits:

1. Meals may be furnished without charge to (RS) volunteers provided the scheduled assignment extends over an established meal period and to occasional volunteers when appropriate.
2. Volunteers are accorded the same privileges as employees in their patronage of the Canteen. The Canteen includes a cafeteria and a retail store which offers items at discounted prices.
3. The office of Voluntary Service will furnish letters of reference to regularly scheduled volunteers upon request.

g. Termination of (RS) Volunteers:

1. The Voluntary Service Officer, Chief or Program Manager, may remove a VAVS Volunteer for unsatisfactory performance, inability to perform the assignment, or violation of established policy and / or procedures.

VIII. Annual Joint Reviews:

A Joint Review of the VAVS Program will be made annually during each fiscal year by the VAVS Representative and the Chief of Voluntary Services or Program Manager.

The purpose of this review will be to make a joint annual inventory of BSMA participation in the VAVS Program and to jointly develop goal and plans for the next year. A strategy is to be developed to assure the most effective use of BSMA volunteers.

All Annual Joint Reviews will be completed during the month of October. When these reviews are completed, they, will be signed by the VAVS Representative and the Voluntary Service Officer completing the review. The original is retained by the Voluntary Service

Office with copies sent to the BSMA National VAVS Director / Representative and the local VAVS Representative.

In instances when the office of Voluntary Service is unable to arrange a meeting with the VAVS Representative, reviews can be conducted by telephone or mail. If Annual Joint Reviews are not completed, a report to that effect must be submitted by the Voluntary Service Officer and sent to the BSMA National VAVS Director.

IX. Gifts and Donations:

All requests for and acknowledgement of gifts and donations should be cleared through the Voluntary Service Office. This procedure pertains to VA personnel, individual donors and all organizations.

Gifts and donations accepted through VAVS channels will be for the sole purpose of meeting particular needs and requirements for the welfare and comfort of veteran patients. Always consult the Voluntary Service Office before bringing any items to the medical center to be sure they are needed and can be used.

When BSMA plans to undertake a specific volunteer project at the medical center, it is important that you thoroughly understand the scope, ramifications and responsibilities involved.

Both VA staff members and the Voluntary Service Officer concerned should, through a common understanding and planning of the project, make every effort to ensure that the best interests of the Veterans and the VAVS Program are served.

General Post Funds are special accounts established at the medical centers to support the needs of the Veteran patients through volunteer donations. All contributions to the General Post Funds should be earmarked at the bottom of the check to the appropriate medical center fund.

X. Automated Information System Records

Voluntary Service is required to record hours and visits of all volunteers each month. The processing of this data will be accomplished by utilizing the Voluntary Service System (VSS).

All volunteer information will be entered into the VSS – this information, including any addition and / or changes, will be recorded and retained as part of the permanent record.

Monthly, semi-annual and annual reports are printed directly from the VSS – these reports are made available to our National VAVS Director.

When a volunteer transfers to another VA facility, upon the volunteer's request, hours of service, awards and other pertinent data should be transferred to the new VA facility. Transferred hours are creditable at the new location towards awards not previously received.

XI. Regulatory Guidance:

All VA regulatory guidance governing Voluntary Service procedures is contained in VHA Handbook 1620.1.