



Veterans Affairs
Canada

Anciens Combattants
Canada

Terms of Reference

Veterans Affairs Canada Stakeholder Committee

Prepared by:

Outreach, Consultation and Engagement Directorate

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1.0 BACKGROUND

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) is experiencing a major demographic shift in the Veterans it serves. As this shift unfolds, VAC must ensure that it continues to provide services and benefits that meet the needs of War Veterans, their spouses and survivors, while at the same time, position itself in order to respond to the needs of Canadian Forces Veterans, members and their families.

VAC has a long tradition of stakeholder engagement in support of program, policy and service development and their evolution over time. In the past, VAC has worked through formal advisory bodies, which included experts and academics in the field of Veterans' issues as well as representatives of Veterans' organizations. In the recent past, new organizations have emerged to represent and advocate on behalf of Canadian Forces members and Veterans and their needs.

VAC is developing an approach to stakeholder engagement which is more flexible and adaptable, will evolve with time and will help position the Department to respond to Veterans and their evolving needs, as well as those of their families.

VAC recognizes the importance of maintaining ongoing and productive relationships with Veterans' organizations, the Ombudsman, experts and academics, as well as other organizations and institutions that have a vested interest in Veterans issues.

One of the key components of VAC's approach is the establishment of a Veterans Affairs Canada Stakeholder Committee.

2.0 VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE

The Veterans Affairs Canada Stakeholder Committee is intended as an action-oriented committee, at which issues of common interest to all participants will be identified for joint and collective action, in the best interest of Veterans and their families.

2.1 ROLE AND OBJECTIVES

- Provide a mechanism for exchange and discussion about emerging issues affecting Veterans and their families, including issues affecting transitioning Canadian Forces members;
- Provide forum for discussion of the impact on Veterans of VAC operations, as guided by formalized legislation, regulation, policies and procedures, including the sharing of pertinent program evaluations and audits;

- Identify issues of common interest among all Committee members to pursue and explore;
- Provide advice on how the Department reaches out to and consults with Veterans, Canadian Forces members and their families; and
- Provide a mechanism for dissemination of information on VAC initiatives and programs.

2.1.1 VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE OPERATIONS

Veterans Affairs Canada will set the agenda for Committee meetings in consultation with member organizations, advisors and participants from other federal government organizations.

Veterans Affairs Canada will be responsible for preparing records of decisions arising from each of the Committee's meetings. Following each meeting, the draft record of decisions will be circulated, via e-mail, to member organizations, advisors and participants from other federal government organizations for their review and comment. The record of decisions will be discussed, further revised if required, and validated at the meeting following that for which the record has been prepared. Once validated, the record will form part of the official documentation of the meeting for which it was prepared.

The Committee will develop a work plan in which it will identify five or six issues to pursue. As issues are addressed, new issues may be added to the work plan. The Committee will identify those issues for which research and evidence are required. VAC will be responsible for obtaining such research and evidence. Committee members will assist VAC in determining how best to obtain research and evidence.

2.1.2 MEETING SCHEDULE

The Committee will meet at least twice per year, face-to-face, in the Fall and Spring. Other meetings may be organized, as required, throughout the year including by way of tele- or video- conferencing.

2.1.3 COMMITTEE SUPPORT

The Department of Veterans Affairs will provide support to the Committee, including meeting preparation, development of agendas and preparation of records of decisions.

2.2 COMMITTEE COMPOSITION

The Committee will be comprised of representatives from national Veterans' organizations and other Federal Government representatives, such as from the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It will also include advisors and observers. In addition, there may be other individuals who will be added to the Committee, upon the recommendation of participants, subject to the approval of the Chair. See Appendix A for list of Veterans' organizations and other participants.

2.2.1 CHAIR

The Deputy Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada will chair the Committee's meetings.

2.2.2 MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Member organizations, listed in Annex A, may designate one representative; in addition, each organization may have a second individual attend as an observer.

In order to ensure continuity on the Committee, member organizations will endeavor to ensure the participation of their designated representative at Committee meetings; however, it is recognized that there may be exceptional circumstances under which an alternate representative may need to replace the designated representative.

2.2.3 ADVISORS

The Committee may include academics and experts in Veterans issues.

2.2.4 FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PARTICIPANTS

Other Federal Government participants include representatives from the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

2.2.5 VAC OFFICIALS

VAC Officials will participate as required and will vary depending on issues being addressed.

2.2.6 OBSERVERS

Other organizations, institutions may be invited to have representatives participate as observers at Committee meetings, including the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman and of the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

2.3 REIMBURSEMENTS

VAC will reimburse the expenses of one participant from each member organization, as well of those of the advisors for their participation in Committee meetings. These expenses include travel, meals and accommodations, in accordance with Treasury Board Policy directives, e.g. only economy class travel. Appendix B provides greater detail with respect to eligibility, limits and administrative requirements.

2.4 CODE OF CONDUCT AND CONFIDENTIALITY GUIDELINES

The work of the Committee will be conducted in such a manner as to foster openness and communication, respect for human dignity and diversity, with fairness and civility.

It is recognized that Committee participants may need to report and disseminate information to their membership, whether in writing, by e-mail, in person or on the Internet (Web page/Facebook). However, it is essential that comments not be attributed to specific individuals or organizations.

2.5 MEDIA

In order to foster openness and communication among Committee participants, the media will not be invited to Committee meetings nor be allowed to be present during meetings.

APPENDIX A

Veterans Affairs Canada Stakeholder Committee Participants

Member Organizations:

- Royal Canadian Legion
- Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada
- National Council of Veterans Associations
- Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping
- Gulf War Veterans Association of Canada
- Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association
- NATO Veterans Organization of Canada
- VeteransofCanada.ca
- Canadian Veterans Advocacy
- Veterans UN-NATO Canada
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
- VeteranVoice.Info

Advisors

- Muriel Westmorland
- Victor Marshall
- Bruce Henwood
- Gordon Sharpe

Other Federal Government Representation:

- The Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces
- The Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Observers

- The Office of the Veterans Ombudsman
- The Office of the Minister of Veterans Affairs

REIMBURSEMENTS

Travel

Eligible participants of the Committee will be reimbursed for expenses incurred to attend Committee meetings or other sanctioned events that are not directly paid by VAC. These expenses will be reimbursed in accordance with federal Treasury Board Guidelines on Travel Rates and Allowances. The expenses include travel, accommodation, meals (that are not pre-arranged) and incidentals.

All travel must be pre-authorized by VAC. Participants will receive an invitation from the Chair (or designate) to participate in any meetings or events. That invitation will serve as the written authorization. Participants submit their receipts and other information, as explained below, within 10 days following the completion of a trip.

Eligible participants must obtain receipts for transportation and accommodations expenses incurred while traveling on government business, as specified in the above descriptions. If a participant is in doubt about the need for a receipt for a certain expense, they should obtain one.

Making arrangements

VAC will usually be responsible for making travel arrangements, including any necessary flight bookings, car rentals, hotel accommodations and meeting space. Committee participants will usually be responsible to secure their individual room directly with the hotel. Some meals may be pre-arranged by the Department (e.g., working lunches).

Reimbursing expenses

The required documentation to submit a travel expense claim will be provided to eligible participants at the Committee meetings. Air travel itinerary and all original receipts, except for meals, will have to be provided with the travel expense claim. Expense claims will be received by the VAC's Consultation, Outreach and Special Engagement Directorate, which will initiate the reimbursement process.

Eligible participants will usually pay the hotel directly for their accommodations, submitting their receipts to VAC for reimbursement. If participants need their accommodations to be paid for by VAC on their behalf, prior arrangements need to be made.

Eligible participants must pay up front for any meals that are not prepaid by the Department; meal costs are subsequently reimbursed at fixed rates set by Treasury Board at the time the expense is incurred. When submitting their expenses, eligible participants should specify which meal is being claimed for reimbursement. Note: no meal allowance will be paid when meals are included in the fare of hotel accommodations, air or rail transportation or provided at the advisory group meeting.

When accommodations are authorized and used, an eligible participant shall be paid an incidental expense allowance that covers a number of miscellaneous expenses, including the cost of gratuities for each day of travel status. Incidental expenses are reimbursed at a flat rate, at the time the expense is incurred, as per Treasury Board guidelines for expenses incurred while staying in commercial or private accommodations. Note: incidental expenses cannot be claimed for a one-day trip.

Participants are responsible for paying all costs not directly associated with participation in the Committee meeting (e.g., telephone costs, costs associated with an extended stay at a hotel not required for the purpose of Government business).