



**VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION OF COOK COUNTY
FY27 BUDGET PROPOSAL & OVERVIEW**

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (To be herein additionally identified as the “VACCC”) is a local unit of government that is composed of elected members, delegates, and alternates representing various Veteran Service Organizations throughout Cook County, Illinois. The central operational office includes a Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent and support staff dedicated to providing direct financial benefits, support, advocacy and additional services to Cook County resident Veterans and their immediate family members.

The establishment of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County was created pursuant to the, *VETERANS AND SERVICE MEMBERS 330 ILCS 45/Military Veterans Assistance Act (MVAA)*. The act mandates the Commission to provide responsible aid, assistance, and necessary services to the Veteran community:

“...For the just, necessary, and needed assistance and services of military veterans, who served in the Armed Forces of the United States and whose last discharge from the service was honorable or general under honorable conditions, to be eligible for assistance, their families, and the families of deceased veterans with service as described in this Section who need assistance and services...”

(330 ILCS 45/2 (From Ch. 23, par. 3082 Sec. 2 (Public Act 102-0732 revisions passed 5/6/2022 Effective Date January 1, 2023)

The following proposals present a comprehensive strategic framework for expanding services, programs, and benefits for the Veteran community throughout Cook County. These initiatives are intended to strengthen and enhance the Commission's capacity to serve Veterans by expanding existing programs, introducing innovative benefits and service offerings, and increasing access through targeted outreach, comprehensive social services, accredited Veteran Service Officer (VSO) representation, and advocacy efforts.

Collectively, these investments are designed to improve service delivery, address unmet needs, and ensure equitable access to critical resources for underserved Veteran populations across Cook County, Illinois.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County is committed to delivering timely, efficient, and effective services to eligible Cook County Veterans, recognizing that immediate access to assistance is critical to addressing their needs and promoting long-term stability.

Through a comprehensive continuum of support, the VACCC provides a wide range of benefits and services designed to assist Veterans and their families during times of need. The services currently offered by the VACCC, along with their respective eligibility requirements and service delivery timeframes, are outlined below:

- **Rental/ Mortgage Assistance:** Secure housing is vital for Veterans and their families. To support their housing needs, the VACCC offers immediate financial assistance towards providing eligible and qualified Veterans with up to \$2,000.00 in direct financial assistance. These funds can be applied towards past due rental or mortgage payments, or, as a first month's payment towards a new rental or mortgage.

This benefit can be requested by an eligible and qualified Veteran once every 12-month time period.

- **Utility Bill(s) Assistance:** Past due utility bills can often place a financial strain on Veterans and their families. To provide support in this area, the VACCC offers immediate financial assistance to eligible and qualified Veterans with up to \$550.00 in financial assistance towards each individual past due electric, gas, and/or water utility bill(s).

This benefit can be requested by an eligible and qualified Veteran once every 12-month time period.

- **Work Attire Assistance:** The VACCC recognizes the importance of professional attire when pursuing gainful employment. To support Veterans in their job search efforts, the VACCC office offers work attire assistance. Through this benefit, eligible and qualified Veterans can receive a \$100.00 Walmart store gift card to assist with the purchase of new clothing for confirmed interviews.

This benefit can be requested by a Veteran once every 24-month time period.

- **Food Assistance:** Access to nutritious food is essential for the well-being of Veterans and their families. To address emergency food assistance needs, the VACCC offers emergency food assistance. Through this benefit, eligible and qualified Veterans can receive 2, \$100.00 Aldi store gift cards to cover immediate food needs.

In recognition of the importance of supporting the entire household, the VACCC also provides an additional \$100.00 Aldi store gift card to each qualifying dependent of the Veteran. This ensures that the needs of the Veteran's family members are also met during times of food insecurity.

This benefit can be requested by an eligible and qualified Veteran once every 6-month time period.

- **Hygiene Assistance:** The VACCC's Emergency Hygiene Cards are designed to assist Eligible Cook Couty Veterans and their qualifying dependents in accessing essential hygienic products. Each Hygiene Card is endowed with a value of \$100.00, aiming to alleviate any potential insecurities regarding access to hygienic necessities.

Currently, eligible Veterans can request this benefit once every 6 month time period.

- **Cell Phone/Land Line Bill Assistance:** Reliable communication is crucial for our Veteran community, serving as a lifeline to access vital healthcare services, Veteran support programs, and other essential resources. This benefit is particularly important for Veterans who rely on their phones for emergencies, as well as sustaining employment, whether in work-from-home positions or ride-sharing careers. By ensuring they maintain consistent communication, our office assists Veterans with up to \$100.00 towards their past due bill to stay connected to opportunities and resources that are critical to their well-being and financial stability.

This benefit can be requested by a Veteran once every 12-month time period.

- **Internet Bill Assistance:** Reliable internet access is essential for Veterans, providing a gateway to numerous opportunities that contribute to both their personal and professional growth. With access to the internet, Veterans can pursue educational opportunities, including online courses and certifications, which are crucial for advancing their skills and improving their employability.

This benefit allows eligible and qualified Veterans to receive up to \$100.00 towards their past-due internet bill, helping to ensure that financial barriers do not hinder their access to these critical resources.

This benefit can be requested by a Veteran once every 12-month time period.

- **Public Transportation Assistance:** To support and ensure Veterans have the means to attend crucial appointments or fulfill their obligations, such as attending medical appointments, educational institutions and workplaces, the VACCC offers public transportation assistance. Through this benefit, eligible and qualified Veterans can receive free, dual CTA (Chicago Transit Authority) and PACE single or 7-day transportation cards.

This benefit can be requested by a Veteran on a weekly basis, or as needed.

- **Funeral Assistance:** At the VACCC, we understand the emotional and financial challenges that can arise when a Veteran passes away. To provide support during this difficult time, we offer funeral/burial assistance to the next of kin, immediate family member, or Power of Attorney of a deceased Veteran.

Through this benefit, eligible individuals can receive up to \$3,000.00 in financial assistance to assist with the payment of a Veteran's funeral expenses. This benefit aims to alleviate some of the financial burdens associated with honoring and laying to rest our nation's Veterans.

- **Records:** There is great significance for Veterans having access to their important records and documents. To assist in obtaining these records, the VACCC provides guidance and support in applying for and obtaining Free certified copies of a Veteran's DD214 from the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC). The DD214 is a crucial document that verifies a Veteran's military service and can be used for various purposes, such as accessing benefits and services.

Alternatively, the VACCC has established a partnership with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA), which directly assists in providing general copies of Veterans' documents for individuals who enlisted in the State of Illinois. This process is most efficient in a Veteran's time of need, with a turnaround time of less than 24 hours.

The VACCC also assists in obtaining FREE certified copies of other essential documents from the Cook County Clerk's office. These documents may include the Veteran's Cook County Birth Certificate, Cook County Marriage Certificate, or a Veterans Cook County Death Certificate.

- **Continuum of Care and Services:** The VACCC takes great pride in its extensive network of partnerships with local, Veteran specific community organizations, and governmental agencies. These collaborations enable us to offer a diverse range of additional Free assistance to the Veteran community. Through these robust collaborations, the VACCC aims to create a supportive ecosystem where Veterans can access a wide range of services conveniently at the VACCC office.

III. MISSION



OUR MISSION

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County is the leading provider of immediate financial and comprehensive services to Cook County Veterans and their families. We pride ourselves on offering a distinct competitive advantage by delivering prompt access to all possible benefits through effective and dynamic advocacy.

With dedication, the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County continues to be the trusted partner that Cook County Veterans and their families can rely on for timely, efficient, and compassionate assistance.

In addition to our financial assistance programs, we are committed to delivering non-financial services and identifying other needs the Veteran community may have. Through our advocacy efforts, we strive to ensure that every Veteran receives the benefits they are entitled to, enabling them to lead fulfilling and dignified lives.

By continuously improving our services and advocating for the rights and well-being of Cook County Veterans and their families, we contribute to the betterment of our Veteran community and honor their invaluable service to our nation.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW



The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County operates under the legal framework established by the Veterans and Service Members (330 ILCS 45/) Military Veterans Assistance Act (MVAA).

In addition to the MVAA, the VACCC's Executive Board and the delegates and alternates from our membership offer guidance and strategic recommendations to support all VACCC operations.

The VACCC's operations are also governed by various regulatory documents and ordinances. These include the VACCC By-Laws, the VACCC Office Policies and Procedures, and Cook County's, "Ordinance Regarding the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County."

To ensure ethical conduct and accountability, the VACCC adheres to the Cook County's Ethics Ordinance and the Office of the Independent Inspector General Ordinance. These ordinances set standards for transparency, integrity, and proper governance.

Furthermore, the VACCC complies with applicable established Cook County policies, which may include policies related to compensation, employee rights, procurement, and budget.

By following these legal and regulatory frameworks, the VACCC upholds the highest standards of professionalism, transparency, and ethical behavior in its operations. These guidelines ensure that the VACCC operates within the legal boundaries and maintains the trust and confidence of the Veteran community it serves.

V. VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

VACCC HEADQUARTERS:

SUPERINTENDENT	Elizabeth D. Soto
DEPUTY-SUPERINTENDENT	Grant Jacobson
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT IV	Vanessa Meadows
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT IV	Coral Duarte
VETERAN SERVICE CASEWORKER	Peter Bencak
VETERAN SERVICE CASEWORKER	Krystal Shaw
MANAGER, FINANCE AND BUSINESS OPERATIONS	Rajeev Samuel
MANAGER, COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH	Conner Intress
COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH COORDINATOR	Julian Calderon
MANAGER, VETERAN SERVICES	Derek Giffin
VETERAN SERVICE OFFICER	Faris Karadsheh

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS:

PRESIDENT	Frank Gutierrez
1st -VICE PRESIDENT	Jesus Segura
2nd -VICE PRESIDENT	John “Dutch” DeGroot
SECRETARY	John Kerrigan
FINANCE OFFICER	Robert Arciola
JUDGE ADVOCATE	Pete Hurt
SERGEANT-AT-ARMS	Eric “Kermit” Morales
CHAPLAIN	George Gandara

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS AT LARGE:

Greg Jacobs
Randall L. Tyner
Evamarie Duff

MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

CONGRESSIONALLY CHARTERED MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS:

American Legion Post 36

Delegate – Patrick Flannigan

Alternate – Gregory Jacobs

American Legion Post 87

Delegate – Willie Mack

Alternate – Ashley Shine

American Legion Post 104

Delegate – Dennis Chavez

Alternate – Michael Tuman

American Legion Post 134

Delegate – Donna Manella

Alternate – Joseph Lampert

American Legion Post 183

Delegate – Raymond P. Toczek

Alternate – Timothy Bodkin

American Legion Post 208

Delegate – Walter Parus

Alternate – Greg Padovani

American Legion Post 216

Delegate – Kevin Ake

Alternate – VACANT

American Legion Post 335

Delegate – Jesus Segura

Alternate – George Gandara

American Legion Post 478

Delegate – Beverly Fitch

Alternate – Nickola Rogers

American Legion Post 525

Delegate – Laura Matuszak

Alternate – William “Bill” Starr

American Legion Post 541

Delegate – Joseph Cook

Alternate – Patrick Hood

American Legion Post 547

Delegate – Rudy Acevedo

Alternate – Jorge Reyes-Ortiz

American Legion Post 615

Delegate – Ken McClory

Alternate – John Kaminecki

American Legion Post 690

Delegate – James Kott

Alternate – Joseph Kraus

American Legion Post 758

Delegate – Frank Gutierrez

Alternate – Beau D. Butts

American Legion Post 806

Delegate – Al Pizarro

Alternate – Pete Hirt

American Legion Post 829

Delegate – Chevonne Woodward

Alternate – VACANT

American Legion Post 888

Delegate – Anthony Muro

Alternate – Anthony Anderson

American Legion Post 923

Delegate – Clemente E. Rodriguez

Alternate – John Kerrigan

American Legion Post 973

Delegate – Richard Lee

Alternate – Aasi Siddique

American Legion Post 974

Delegate – Anthony Siciliano

Alternate – Thomas Zito

American Legion Post 1028

Delegate – John Borg

Alternate – John Ayala

American Legion Post 1052

Delegate – Megan Everett

Alternate – Brian Phenegar

American Legion Post 1932

Delegate – James McGee, Jr.

Alternate – Charles Salley

American Legion Post 1941

Delegate – Robert Stoltz

Alternate – Edward Krzeminski

American Legion Post 1983

Delegate – Anthony J. Thomas

Alternate – Frank Kelly

AMVETS Post 66

Delegate – James Schultz

Alternate – James “Jim” Parker

AMVETS Post 192

Delegate – Herman Deckys

Alternate – Gabriel Bedolla

AMVETS Post 268

Delegate – Eddie Brown Jr.

Alternate – Richard Nielson

DAV Chapter 84

Delegate – Kenneth Boor

Alternate – William Byers

Jewish War Veterans Post 710

Delegate – Dr. Jerry Field

Alternate – Dennis Kane

**Marine Corps League
Detachment 553**

**Delegate – Randall L. Tyner
Alternate – Paul Zogg**

**Marine Corps League
Detachment 1408**

**Delegate – Sergio Correa
Alternate – Alejandro Morales**

**MOAA
Northshore & Chicago**

**Delegate – Matthew Garrison
Alternate – VACANT**

**Military Order of the
World Wars Chapter 82**

**Delegate – Zhi Cheng Chen
Alternate – VACANT**

PVA Vaughan Chapter

**Delegate – Robert Arciola
Alternate – Robert Statam**

VFW Post 311

**Delegate – Aretha Spurlock
Alternate – Nekohl Johnson**

VFW Post 981

**Delegate – Stewart Abblink
Alternate – Larry Blieski**

VFW Post 1337

**Delegate – John “Dutch” DeGroot
Alternate – Wally Beckman**

VFW Post 2202

**Delegate – John Healy
Alternate – Joeseeph Wein**

VFW Post 2868

**Delegate – Eric “Kermit” Morales
Alternate – EvaMarie Duff**

VFW Post 2978

**Delegate – Jesus Jimenez
Alternate – Scott Friedland**

VFW Post 3579**Delegate – Keith Renner**
Alternate – Ramon Prieto**VFW Post 5079****Delegate – Jennifer Glenn**
Alternate – Antonio Munoz IV**VFW Post 5979****Delegate – David Ruiz**
Alternate – Don Hanson**VFW Post 7186****Delegate – Thomas J. Hughes**
Alternate – Elliot Jones**VFW Post 8322****Delegate – Paul Bezazian**
Alternate – Paul Michael Knudtson**VFW Post 9284****Delegate – Arthur J. Ellingsen**
Alternate – Phillip “Chappy” Ferrer**VFW Post 10778****Delegate – Chuck Bosko**
Alternate – VACANT**Vietnam Veterans of America**
Chapter 242**Delegate – Kevin Calkins**
Alternate – John B. Andres Jr.**STATE CHARTERED MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS:****Coalition of Veteran Organizations** **Delegate – Chuck Bosko**
Alternate – Joseph Cook

In FY26, VACCC membership remains essential to strengthening collaboration, and ensuring that the diverse needs of Veterans throughout Cook County are represented. By bringing together Veteran organizations and advocates, the membership continues to help guide informed policies, improve resource coordination, and advance equitable, responsive services for Veterans and their families.

VI. FY26 OFFICE SUMMARY



Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County Office – 1100 S. Hamilton Ave., Suite, C-O11 Chicago, IL. 60612

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County operates its Hamilton Headquarters (HHQ) from the lower level of the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center at 1100 S. Hamilton Avenue in Chicago. During FY26, the VACCC expanded its geographic presence through the establishment of the Chicago Regional Office (CRO), located in the George W. Dunne Cook County Office Building at 69 W. Washington Street, Chicago, Illinois 60602. The Commission is also preparing to establish a third service location at the Rolling Meadows Courthouse, further extending access to Veterans throughout northern and northwestern Cook County.

At the beginning of FY26, the VACCC was allocated 20 full-time positions. As of the third quarter, eleven positions were filled and nine remained vacant. The Commission continues working through the Cook County hiring processes, with the goal of filling its authorized vacancies by the end of FY26.

FY26 VAC HHC STAFF:

• Superintendent:	Elizabeth D. Soto	Veteran
• Deputy Superintendent:	Grant Jacobson	Veteran
• Chief Financial Officer —	Pending RTH Reclass	
• Finance and Business Operations Manager:	Rajeev Samuel	
• Administrative Assistant IV:	Vanessa Meadows	
• Communications and Outreach Manager:	Conner Intress	Veteran
• Communications and Outreach Coordinator:	Julian Calderon	Veteran
• Veteran Services, Manager —	VACANT	
• Veteran Service Officer:	Faris Karadsheh	Veteran
• Veteran Service Officer —	VACANT	
• Veteran Service Officer —	VACANT	
• Administrative Assistant IV:	Coral Duarte	
• Veteran Service Caseworker:	Peter Bencak	Veteran
• Veteran Service Caseworker:	Krystal Shaw	

FY26 VAC CRO STAFF:

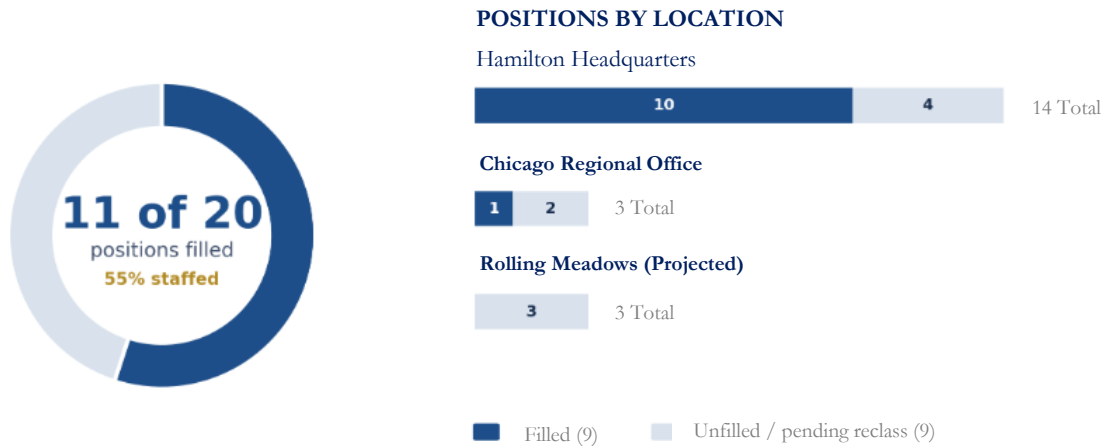
• Veteran Services Manager:	Derek Giffin	Veteran
• Administrative Assistant IV—	VACANT	
• Veteran Service Officer —	VACANT	

FY26 PROJECTED VAC ROLLING MEADOWS STAFF:

• Administrative Assistant IV:	Pending RTH Reclass	
• Veteran Service Officer —	VACANT	
• Veteran Service Officer —	VACANT	

FY26 VACCC Staffing Overview

Authorized, filled, and unfilled full-time positions by service location



9 positions remain available to strengthen service capacity

7 current staff members are identified as Veterans in the FY26 roster

Note: Positions pending RTH/re-classification are included among the nine currently unfilled positions

To better align staffing resources with the VACCC's strategic and operational priorities, two authorized positions were submitted for reclassification. These changes include the reclassification of management-level positions to establish a Chief Financial Officer position and an additional Administrative Assistant IV position. These adjustments are intended to strengthen financial oversight, administrative capacity, internal controls, and front line operational support as the Commission expands its programs and regional service locations.

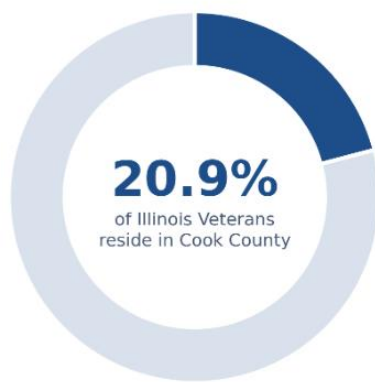
While vacancies remain, the VACCC is committed to completing the hiring process as promptly as possible. The Commission's current team continues to work collaboratively and diligently to provide high quality services to Veterans and their families throughout Cook County. Filling the remaining positions will increase service capacity, reduce processing times, strengthen regional coverage, and support the continued expansion of the Commission's financial assistance, outreach, and Veterans claims programs.

The VACCC's eleven full-time staff members perform a broad range of essential responsibilities, including eligibility determinations, administration of emergency financial assistance, coordination of supportive services, community outreach, case management, fiscal oversight, and professional claims assistance through accredited Veteran Service Officers. Together, these functions help ensure that eligible Veterans, dependents, and families receive timely access to benefits, services, financial support, and advocacy.

Cook County remains the most populous county in Illinois and the second-most populous county in the United States, with an estimated 5.19 million residents. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 132,321 Veterans reside in Cook County. When compared with the approximately 633,066 Veterans identified statewide in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' FY2024 Illinois summary, Cook County accounts for approximately 21% of Illinois' Veteran population.

Cook County Represents Approximately One in Five Illinois Veterans.

Estimated Veteran population, FY2025 / 2020-2024



COOK COUNTY

132,321

Veterans

STATE OF ILLINOIS

633,066

Veterans

This concentration reinforces the need for accessible, countywide Veteran services.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, Cook County (Veterans, 202-2024); U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, NCVAC Illinois State Summary, FY2024. Note: The 20.9% share is calculated from separate federal estimates and is presented as an approximate comparison.

This significant concentration of Veterans, combined with Cook County's geographic size, socioeconomic diversity, and urban, suburban, and underserved communities highlights the strategic importance of the VACCC. The Commission serves as a critical local point of access for Veterans who may experience financial hardship, housing instability, transportation barriers, difficulty navigating federal benefits, or limited access to traditional Veteran service systems.

During FY26, the VACCC substantially expanded its staffing structure, claims-assistance infrastructure, regional presence, and field-based outreach. The Commission continued providing historically high levels of direct financial assistance while strengthening its Veteran Service Officer program to help Veterans pursue federal and state benefits. The continued development of the VSO program has the potential to generate millions of dollars in earned benefits for Cook County Veterans, producing a meaningful economic impact.

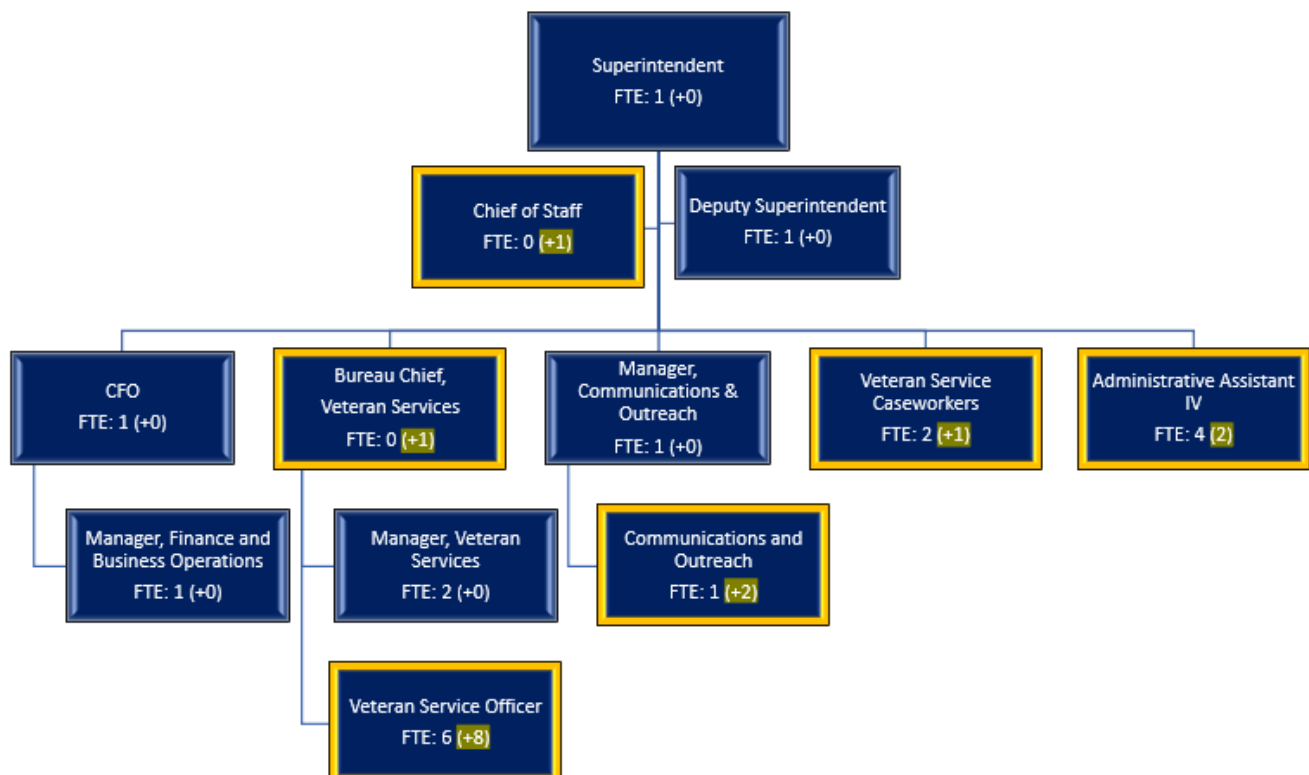
VII. FY27 OFFICE STAFF

Expanding the workforce of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County is essential to meeting the growing volume, complexity, and geographic diversity of needs among Veterans and their families. Although the VACCC's current team of eleven full-time employees continues to serve with professionalism and dedication, existing staffing levels limit the Commission's ability to respond fully and promptly to increasing requests for financial assistance, benefits advocacy, housing stabilization, transportation, employment support, mental health referrals, and other critical services.

For Fiscal Year 2027, the VACCC proposes an organizational structure comprising of thirty five full-time positions. This request preserves the Commission's 20 positions authorized in FY26 and adds 15 strategically aligned positions. Among the new FY27 requests are a Veteran Services Bureau Chief and eight additional Veteran Service Officers. These positions are central to the VACCC's strategy to expand direct services, establish countywide VSO coverage, strengthen administrative oversight, and maximize the amount of federal benefits secured for Cook County Veterans and their families.

FY27 PROPOSED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County



Expanding the Veteran Services Bureau

A principal component of the FY27 staffing proposal is the continued development of a seventeen-member Veteran Services Bureau consisting of:

- **One Veteran Services Bureau Chief**, responsible for overseeing bureau operations, strategic planning, accreditation, compliance, training, quality assurance, and performance
- **Two Veteran Services Managers** responsible for supervising regional teams and ensuring consistency and accountability across service locations
- **Fourteen Veteran Service Officers**, including eight new VSO positions requested for FY27, responsible for benefits counseling, claims development, advocacy, appeals support, community-based services, and case follow-up.

The VACCC intends to develop an accredited Veteran Services Bureau capable of establishing coordinated coverage across all seventeen Cook County Commissioner districts. Assignments will be structured so that each district has a designated Veteran Services contact and access to localized claims assistance. This model will increase visibility, reduce transportation and geographic barriers, and bring professional benefits advocacy directly into the communities where Veterans live.

The eight new VSO's will significantly expand the VACCC's ability to assist Veterans with claims for disability compensation, pensions, dependency benefits, survivor benefits, healthcare eligibility, and other federal and state benefits earned through military service. They will also allow the Commission to serve more Veterans simultaneously, reduce appointment wait times, improve claim preparation, and provide meaningful follow-up throughout what can otherwise be a lengthy and difficult federal claims process.

Generating a Significant Return for Cook County

The proposed VSO expansion should be viewed not only as a service investment, but also as a revenue-generating economic strategy for Cook County. Accredited VSO's help Veterans and eligible family members obtain federal benefits that might otherwise remain unclaimed. These awards bring new federal dollars directly into Cook County without increasing local taxes or creating additional County-funded entitlement obligations.

Based on the demonstrated success of the VACCC's developing VSO Program, the addition of eight VSO's is expected to help secure millions of dollars in new and retroactive federal benefits for Cook County Veterans and their families. These may include:

- Monthly VA disability compensation;
- Retroactive benefit awards;
- Veterans' pension benefits;
- Dependency and survivor compensation;
- Education and vocational rehabilitation benefits;
- Healthcare access and related cost savings; and
- Other federal and state benefits earned through military service.

The financial effect extends far beyond a single award. A successful disability or pension claim may provide a Veteran with reliable monthly income for many years and, in certain circumstances, for the remainder of the Veteran's life. Consequently, the full value of the benefits secured through the VACCC's VSO Program may reach many times the annual operating cost of the positions responsible for obtaining them.

These federal dollars circulate throughout Cook County as Veterans use their benefits to pay for housing, food, transportation, healthcare, utilities, and other necessities. This spending supports local businesses, strengthens household financial stability, reduces dependence on emergency assistance programs, and can help prevent eviction, homelessness, and other costly crises.

When these outcomes are considered collectively, the VACCC has the potential to effectively return its operating investment to Cook County many times over. In practical terms, the Commission helps pay for itself through the financial dividends generated by successful claims, the federal resources brought into the County, and the public costs avoided when Veterans achieve greater financial and housing stability.

The VSO Program therefore provides two complementary returns:

1. A human return, measured through improved financial security, health, dignity, independence, and quality of life for Veterans and their families

2. An economic return, measured through millions of federal dollars brought into Cook County, increased local spending, and reduced pressure on County-funded crisis services.

To demonstrate this return transparently, the VACCC will continue strengthening its performance measurement and reporting processes. Outcomes may include the number of claims filed, claims approved, Veterans served, retroactive awards secured, projected annual recurring benefits, processing times, geographic coverage, and the estimated federal dollars returned to Cook County.

Special Emphasis and Underserved Populations

Several members of the Veteran Services Bureau will serve in dual capacities as Special Emphasis Coordinators. These assignments will provide focused expertise, outreach, and advocacy for Veteran populations that may experience unique barriers to traditional systems of care. Areas of specialization will include:

- Military Sexual Trauma (MST)
- Elderly Veterans
- Homeless and justice-involved Veterans
- Minority Veterans
- Women Veterans
- LGBTQ+ Veterans

This approach will allow the VACCC to deliver culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and individualized assistance reflecting the diversity of Cook County's Veteran community. It will also strengthen partnerships with federal, state, county, municipal, and community-based organizations serving these populations.

Improving Access, Timeliness, and Service Coordination

Additional staffing will directly strengthen the VACCC's ability to deliver timely, comprehensive, and individualized assistance. Increased capacity will allow the Commission to:

- Reduce appointment and application-processing times
- Respond promptly to Veterans experiencing financial or housing crises
- Improve claims development and case-management quality
- Increase appointment availability and community-based office hours
- Expand outreach within underserved communities
- Strengthen follow-up and continuity of care
- Improve performance monitoring and regulatory compliance
- Provide appropriate administrative support for direct-service employees

For Veterans facing eviction, utility disconnection, food insecurity, homelessness, or an urgent benefits issue, timely intervention can be transformative. A prompt response may prevent a temporary hardship from becoming a long-term crisis, improve housing and health outcomes, and, in the most serious circumstances, help save lives.

A larger workforce will also support a relationship-centered case-management model. Rather than addressing only a Veteran's immediate need, the VACCC will be better positioned to identify related challenges, coordinate referrals, monitor progress, and provide sustained assistance as the Veteran's circumstances evolve.

Supporting Regional Growth

The VACCC has undergone substantial organizational growth, evolving from an operation staffed by only three employees approximately two years ago into a developing countywide service agency. The Commission is expanding beyond its headquarters to increase access through regional and community-based locations throughout Cook County.

Operating additional service locations requires sufficient personnel to maintain dependable hours, manage appointments, conduct outreach, provide on-site VSO services, administer financial assistance, protect confidential information, and ensure consistent standards at every facility. Without corresponding staffing growth, geographic expansion alone cannot produce the intended improvements in access and responsiveness.

The FY27 staffing proposal will ensure that the VACCC's physical expansion is supported by the workforce necessary to operate each location safely, efficiently, and effectively.

Recruitment, Retention, and Workforce Development

Sustaining the VACCC's current workforce is equally important to adding new positions. Existing employees possess valuable institutional knowledge, established community relationships, and specialized experience navigating complex Veteran benefit and assistance systems. Their continued service is essential to maintaining operational stability and continuity for the Veterans and families who rely on the Commission.

Competitive salaries, clearly defined career pathways, accreditation opportunities, professional development, and ongoing training are necessary to recruit and retain qualified professionals. Veteran services require a distinctive combination of technical expertise, sound judgment, empathy, confidentiality, and crisis-response capability. Compensation aligned with the current labor market will strengthen the VACCC's ability to attract highly qualified candidates, fill vacancies efficiently, reduce turnover, and promote workforce equity.

Investing in Veterans and Cook County

The FY27 staffing proposal represents a strategic investment in access, equity, accountability, and measurable economic outcomes. By maintaining the twenty positions authorized in FY26 and adding fifteen strategically targeted positions, including the new Veteran Services Bureau Chief and eight additional VSO's, Cook County will equip the VACCC to assist more Veterans, secure millions of dollars in federal benefits, expand countywide access, and reduce the long-term public costs associated with unresolved Veteran crises.

Few County investments offer such a direct and measurable opportunity to produce both life-changing outcomes and substantial economic returns. Every successful claim represents more than an individual benefit: it represents federal funding brought into Cook County, greater household stability, increased local economic activity, and reduced reliance on County-funded emergency services.

A well-supported VACCC is therefore not merely an expense within the County budget. It is a high-impact investment that produces continuing dividends for Veterans, their families, local communities, and Cook County as a whole. By investing in the VACCC's workforce today, Cook County will strengthen its ability to honor service, expand opportunity, and deliver lasting results for generations of Veterans to come.

CURRENT FY26 & PROPOSED FY27 VACCC POSITIONS

POSITION TITLES	BASIC POSITION FUNCTION	CURRENT AND PROPOSED SALARIES
Superintendent Current Position	The Superintendent of the VACCC office is the Chief Executive responsible for overseeing all operations, ensuring the effective delivery of services to Veterans, and leading the organization's strategic initiatives. This role involves managing staff, developing and implementing policies, and coordinating with government agencies and community partners. The Superintendent ensures that the VACCC meets its mission of serving Cook County Veterans and their families by providing leadership, financial oversight, and ensuring compliance with relevant regulations.	\$ 136,334.02
Deputy-Superintendent Current Position	The Deputy Superintendent of the VACCC office will support the Superintendent in managing day-to-day operations and executing strategic initiatives. This role will involve overseeing various departments, ensuring the effective delivery of services to Veterans, and assisting with policy development and implementation. This position will also play a key role in staff supervision, budget management, and maintaining compliance with regulations, acting as a vital second-in-command to ensure the VACCC office meets its mission and goals.	\$ 118,724.21
Chief Financial Officer Current Position (Manager, Veteran Services – Restructured)	The Chief of Staff provides executive-level coordination and operational support to VACCC leadership. The position manages Commission-wide projects and special initiatives, coordinates government affairs and external communications, implements approved policies and procedures, prepares executive briefings and reports, monitors operational and compliance risks, and ensures leadership priorities are carried out consistently across departments and external partners.	\$ 146,062.61
Manager, Finance and Business Operations Current Position	The Manager, Finance and Business Operations works closely with the CFO and Superintendent and maintains financial accuracy and ensuring compliance for the VACCC. Responsible for all financial reporting, including expenditure control, compliance management, budget management, financial planning, and forecasting.	\$ 114,881.00

CURRENT FY26 & PROPOSED FY27 VACCC POSITIONS

POSITION TITLES	POSITION FUNCTION	CURRENT AND PROPOSED SALARIES
Chief of Staff <i>Proposed Position</i>	The Chief of Staff coordinates and implements executive priorities, Commission-wide projects, government affairs, external communications, and special initiatives for the VACCC. The position ensures policies and operations comply with the Illinois Military Veterans Assistance Act and Cook County requirements, prepares executive materials, monitors operational and reputational risks, promotes accountability across departments, and represents senior leadership when delegated.	\$127,218.30 -Proposed
Bureau Chief, Veteran Services <i>Proposed Position</i>	The Bureau Chief of Veteran Services will provide high-level oversight and strategic leadership of the VACCC's Veteran Service Officer (VSO) program. This role is responsible for supervising the Managers of Veteran Services and ensuring the effective coordination, training, and performance of all VSOs throughout Cook County. The Bureau Chief plays a pivotal role in advancing the agency's service delivery by overseeing claims operations, standardizing best practices, and aligning VSO efforts with VACCC's mission. Through program development, operational guidance, and strategic planning, this position ensures Veterans across all 17 districts receive consistent, high-quality support and representation.	\$ 127,218.30 -Proposed
Manager, Veteran Services Current Position	Responsible for supervising and directing a team of Veterans Service Officers (VSO's) engaged in obtaining, compiling, and presenting information pertaining to VA claims for benefits. The Veteran Service Officer Supervisor plays a crucial role in ensuring the effective delivery of services to Veterans by providing guidance, support, and oversight to VACCC VSO's.	\$ 112,881.93
Manager, Veteran Services Current Position		\$ 108,234.88
Veteran Service Officer Current Position	The Veteran Service Officer (VSO) is a crucial role within the organization, responsible for assisting Veterans in filing service-connected disability claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The VSO also provides support to Veterans in obtaining benefits related to vocational rehabilitation, VA Home Loans, education, insurance, burial benefits, and non-service-connected pension benefits. The VSO plays a vital role in ensuring that Veterans receive the benefits they are entitled to and provides guidance and advocacy throughout the claims process.	\$65,686.40
Veteran Service Officer Current Position		\$ 71,107.17
Veteran Service Officer X4 Current Positions		\$ 80,306.72
Veteran Service Officer X8 <i>Proposed Positions</i>		\$ 59,562.88 -Proposed

CURRENT FY26 & PROPOSED FY27 VACCC POSITIONS

POSITION TITLES	POSITION FUNCTION	CURRENT AND PROPOSED SALARIES
Manager, Communications & Outreach Current Position	The Manager of Communications and Outreach develops and leads strategies to promote VACCC programs, services, and emergency financial assistance to Veterans and their families. The position oversees outreach events, marketing, social media, newsletters, website content, staff activities, and organizational messaging while building partnerships with government agencies, community organizations, and other stakeholders to expand the VACCC's visibility, engagement, and impact.	\$ 118,502.66
Communications and Outreach Coordinator Current Position Communications and Outreach Coordinator X2 <i>Proposed Positions</i>	The Communications and Outreach Coordinator's role is crucial in expanding the reach and impact of the VACCC by effectively communicating and engaging with various stakeholders, implementing outreach strategies, and fostering partnerships that enhance the VACCC's services and programs.	\$ 73,582.53 \$ 69,182.88 -Proposed
Administrative Assistant IV Current Position Administrative Assistant IV Current Position Administrative Assistant IV Current Position Administrative Assistant IV Current Position (Manager, Comms & Outreach – Restructured) Administrative Assistant IV X2 <i>Proposed Positions</i>	The Administrative Assistant IV to the Superintendent provides high-level administrative support, ensuring the efficient operation of the Superintendent's office. This role involves managing complex schedules, coordinating executive meetings, handling confidential correspondence, and serving as the primary liaison between the Superintendent and other departments. Additionally, the Administrative Assistant IV oversees special projects, prepares reports, and assists in decision-making processes by providing essential administrative support tailored to the Superintendent's needs.	\$ 94,613.07 \$ 74,513.92 \$ 69,182.88 \$ 69,182.88 \$ 69,182.88 -Proposed
Veteran Service Caseworker Current Position Veteran Service Caseworker Current Position Veteran Service Caseworker <i>Proposed Position</i>	Responsible for assessing and disbursing all Veteran requests for emergency financial assistance. As the primary point of contact for Veterans seeking financial support, the Veteran Service Caseworker plays a critical role in evaluating Veteran eligibility, requests and ensuring timely disbursement of funds to address emergency needs.	\$ 81,515.59 \$71,357.15 \$69,182.88 -Proposed

Sustaining the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County's current workforce is essential to the agency's continued success, operational stability, and ability to fulfill its mission. Retaining and investing in existing employees preserves valuable institutional knowledge while strengthening service delivery through an experienced, dedicated, and highly engaged team. These professionals are the backbone of the VACCC and often serve as the first and sometimes only point of contact for Veterans and their families navigating complex systems to obtain critical assistance.

Equally important is the recruitment and onboarding of qualified professionals to fill current vacancies and support future growth. As demand for services continues to increase, the VACCC must offer competitive salaries that reflect current market conditions. Equitable and competitive compensation strengthens the agency's ability to attract and retain highly qualified professionals while demonstrating its commitment to excellence. This is particularly important in the specialized and high-stakes field of Veteran services, where compassion, experience, sound judgment, and technical expertise can significantly affect a Veteran's outcome.

The need for a comprehensive staffing strategy further highlights the VACCC's planned expansion. The agency is preparing to increase its staffing capacity and establish operations at two additional locations across Cook County. This growth reflects the rising demand for assistance and the VACCC's commitment to improving accessibility, outreach, and responsiveness for Veterans and their families throughout the county.

For Veterans experiencing a crisis, timely intervention can be transformative, helping prevent homelessness, promote financial stability, improve well-being, and, in some circumstances, save lives. A larger workforce will also enhance the VACCC's ability to engage communities throughout Cook County. Increased staffing will support expanded service hours, additional appointments, and targeted outreach to historically underserved Veteran populations.

Finally, increased staffing will provide the foundation necessary for program expansion and long-term innovation. With the appropriate personnel in place, the VACCC can scale successful pilot programs, develop initiatives addressing emerging needs, strengthen communications and community partnerships, and remain responsive to changes in the Veteran-service and public-policy landscape.

VIII. OFFICE SPACE

FY27 OFFICE SPACE PROJECTIONS

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County recognizes that adequate, functional, and geographically accessible office space is essential to fulfilling its mission. As demand for financial assistance, VA claims advocacy, outreach, and coordinated support continues to grow, the VACCC must maintain professional environments that protect privacy, support staff productivity, and allow Veterans and their families to receive timely, high-quality service closer to home.

During FY26, the VACCC advanced a deliberate regional-service model anchored by its headquarters at 1100 S. Hamilton Avenue and strengthened by the operation of the Chicago Regional Office at 69 W. Washington Street, Suite 1420. The VACCC also secured space within the Rolling Meadows Courthouse at 2121 Euclid Avenue and is working toward its grand opening. Together, these locations establish a stronger foundation for county-wide access while reducing transportation, scheduling, and geographic barriers that have historically affected Veterans outside the central Chicago area.

The headquarters at 1100 S. Hamilton Avenue will remain the primary location for executive administration, fiscal operations, emergency financial assistance, casework, records, and other centralized functions. The VACCC will continue to maximize the existing footprint through efficient space planning and shared operational resources while evaluating workspace needs associated with approved and proposed staffing growth.

Until the VACCC completes its contract for a comprehensive digitization and electronic case-management solution, financial-assistance files and record-dependent functions will remain principally based at the VAC's HHQ. This interim structure protects continuity, confidentiality, and records control while regional offices expand access to Veteran Service Officer (VSO) claims support, benefits navigation, outreach, appointments, and technology-assisted services.

FY27 Strategic Office Priorities

- **Preserve operational continuity.** Maintain headquarters as the centralized administrative and financial-assistance hub while regional capacity expands.
- **Activate Rolling Meadows.** Complete the build-out, furnishing, technology deployment, staffing plan, and public launch of the northwest regional office.
- **Establish a Southland presence.** Identify and advance the VACCC's fourth and final planned installation in the Southland region, prioritizing communities that have lacked direct, convenient access to VAC services and benefits.
- **Advance digital readiness.** Equip regional locations to transition smoothly into a future secure, county-wide case-management environment once contracting and implementation are complete.

NEW AND EXPANDED LOCATIONS FOR VETERAN SERVICES

The VACCC's regional expansion is designed to create a balanced service network across Cook County. Each site has a distinct operational purpose while remaining connected to headquarters, community partners, and the Commission's broader mission of ensuring that no eligible Veteran or family member is left without meaningful access to assistance.

LOCATION	FY27 STATUS	PRIMARY ROLE
1100 S. Hamilton Ave. Chicago	Operating	Headquarters; administration, fiscal operations, financial assistance, casework, records, and centralized support.
69 W. Washington St., Suite 1420 Chicago	Operating	Chicago Regional Office; discreet, specialized VSO claims assistance and benefits navigation.
2121 Euclid Ave. Rolling Meadows	Secured; grand opening in progress	Northwest Regional Office; VSO hub, Veteran computer lab, appointments, collaboration, and outreach support.
Southland Region Site to be finalized	FY27 priority	Fourth and final planned installation; direct access for underserved south and southwest suburban Veteran communities.

VACCC FY27 BUDGET REQUEST | OFFICE SPACE

Chicago Regional Office - 69 W. Washington Street

Now operating in FY26 at the George W. Dunne Building, the Chicago Regional Office provides a dedicated and discreet setting for Veterans who live, work, or receive services in downtown Chicago and surrounding communities. The office expands access to

accredited VSO claims assistance, benefits navigation, appointments, and referrals while supporting a safe and welcoming environment for populations that may require additional privacy or specialized assistance.

The location is particularly well positioned to serve Veterans affected by Military Sexual Trauma (MST), elderly Veterans, Women Veterans, minority Veterans, and Veterans experiencing homelessness or justice-system involvement. Appointment-based service may continue when appropriate to protect confidentiality, manage demand, and ensure focused, individualized support.

Northwest Regional Office - Rolling Meadows Courthouse

The VACCC has secured its northwest regional location in the lower level of the Rolling Meadows Courthouse and is working with Cook County partners toward completion and a formal grand opening. This site represents a significant step in bringing direct VACCC services closer to Veterans in north and northwest suburban Cook County, many of whom otherwise face lengthy travel to Chicago for in-person assistance.

Until the VACCC's digitization contract is completed and the secure electronic case-management environment is fully implemented, the Rolling Meadows location will initially operate primarily as a VSO hub. Accredited personnel will assist Veterans and eligible family members with VA disability compensation, pension, survivor benefits, appeals, records requests, benefits navigation, and related claims matters. Financial-assistance cases requiring access to centralized files or record-dependent processing will continue to be coordinated through headquarters during this interim period.

A dedicated computer lab will allow Veterans to securely access online VA resources, request records, prepare or upload supporting documents, attend virtual appointments, review claim information, and complete other benefits-related tasks with staff guidance when needed. This feature is especially important for Veterans who lack reliable internet service, computer equipment, digital literacy support, or a private place to manage sensitive benefit matters.

Planned Functional Capacity

- **Veteran Service Officer offices.** Private workspaces for confidential claims consultations and individualized case development.
- **Veteran computer lab.** Multiple workstations and monitors to support digital access, document preparation, records retrieval, and benefits-related activity.
- **Waiting and reception space.** A professional entry point that supports scheduled and walk-in service as capacity permits.
- **Conference and collaboration areas.** Space for partner meetings, staff coordination, training, outreach preparation, and small-group Veteran programming.
- **Administrative and support areas.** Workstations, storage, copy space, and staff facilities necessary for reliable day-to-day operations.

PROPOSED ROLLING MEADOWS OFFICE LAYOUT

2121 Euclid Avenue, Rolling Meadows, Illinois 60008

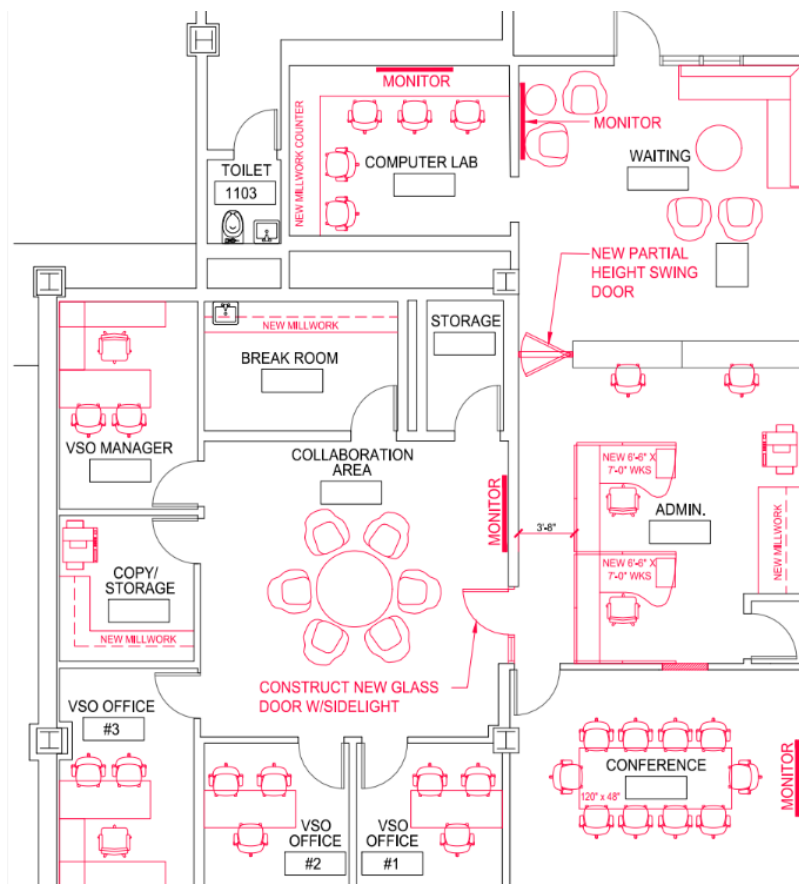


Figure 1. Rolling Meadows planned floor configuration, including three VSO offices, a Veteran computer lab, conference room, administrative workstations, collaboration area, waiting area, and operational support spaces.

The proposed layout supports both confidential one-on-one service and practical technology access. Its combination of private VSO offices, shared technology, meeting space, and administrative infrastructure will allow the VACCC to establish a sustainable northwest presence that can expand as staffing and digital capabilities mature.

FY27 Southland Regional Office Projection

In FY27, the VACCC will work toward establishing its fourth and final planned office installation in the Southland region of Cook County. The initiative will focus on communities that have historically been underserved and have lacked direct, consistent access to VACCC programs, accredited claims assistance, and benefits navigation. The Southland office will complete the Commission's regional framework by extending an accessible service point to Veterans and families in south and southwest suburban areas.

Site selection and implementation will be guided by Veteran population needs, public transportation access, ADA accessibility, privacy, safety, technology infrastructure, proximity to partner organizations, parking availability, and long-term operational sustainability. The VACCC will continue collaborating with Cook County leadership, Commissioners, municipalities, Veteran Service Organizations, and community partners to identify an appropriate location and minimize unnecessary facility costs wherever feasible.

Like Rolling Meadows, the Southland location may initially emphasize VSO services, digital access, scheduled appointments, outreach coordination, and referrals while the Commission's county-wide digitization initiative is completed. The final service model will be scaled to available staffing, technology, facility readiness, and demonstrated regional demand.

Projected County-Wide Impact

- **Reduced travel barriers.** Veterans will have more opportunities to receive in-person help without traveling to central Chicago.

- **Earlier access to earned benefits.** Regional VSO capacity can help Veterans initiate and develop claims sooner, improving access to federal compensation and support that also flows back into Cook County households and communities.
- **More equitable service delivery.** A four-location framework strengthens access for suburban, elderly, disabled, low-income, and transportation-limited Veterans.
- **Stronger community partnerships.** Regional offices create dependable hubs for collaboration with municipalities, townships, VSOs, healthcare partners, legal providers, and other agencies.
- **Operational resilience.** Distributed service locations provide flexibility during periods of elevated demand, staffing transitions, emergencies, or temporary disruptions at any single site.

The VACCC's FY27 office-space strategy is a direct investment in accessibility, dignity, and service equity. By sustaining the headquarters at 1100 S. Hamilton Avenue, fully utilizing the Chicago Regional Office at 69 W. Washington Street, opening the secured Rolling Meadows location, and advancing a final Southland installation, the Commission will be positioned to provide a coordinated and geographically responsive network of Veteran services across Cook County.

These investments will allow the VACCC to meet Veterans and their families where they are, strengthen the reach of accredited claims assistance, expand access to technology, and prepare the agency for a secure digitized future. With continued County support and strong community partnerships, the VACCC will further its commitment to ensuring that no Cook County Veteran is overlooked, underserved, or left behind.

IX. VACCC VEHICLE FLEET

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC) will implement a four-vehicle fleet in FY27 to strengthen direct service delivery, improve staff mobility, expand community outreach, and reduce transportation barriers for Veterans and their families. The fleet will support the Commission's growing multi-location service model by connecting the VACCC Headquarters, the Chicago Regional Office, the Rolling Meadows Regional Office, outreach locations, partner sites, and communities throughout Cook County.

Access to dependable agency vehicles is an operational necessity as the VACCC expands beyond a single centralized office. Veteran Service Officers, outreach personnel, finance staff, and executive leadership regularly travel for claims appointments, outreach events, community meetings, partner coordination, document delivery, site oversight, and other official business. A dedicated fleet will reduce reliance on personal vehicles, mileage reimbursement, and inconsistent transportation availability while increasing the VAC's ability to respond quickly and equitably across a geographically large county.

The initial fleet in FY27 will consist of one Ford Bronco Sport, two Ford Maverick XLT vehicles, and one Ford T350 medium-roof wagon. Vehicles will be strategically assigned based on location, staff demand, service type, passenger capacity, and the need to maintain reliable coverage across the Commission's regional network.

FY27 Fleet Allocation

VEHICLE	ASSIGNED LOCATION	AUTHORIZED USERS	PRIMARY PURPOSE
Ford Bronco Sport	VACCC Headquarters 1100 S. Hamilton Ave.	VSOs, Outreach, Finance, Deputy Superintendent, and Superintendent	County-wide official travel, claims and outreach support, fiscal/administrative functions, meetings, site oversight, and operational response.
Ford Maverick XLT	VACCC Headquarters 1100 S. Hamilton Ave.	VSOs, Outreach, Finance, Deputy Superintendent, and Superintendent	Shared headquarters coverage, outreach deployment, claims appointments, partner visits, document and supply transport, and leadership travel.
Ford Maverick XLT	Chicago Regional Office 69 W. Washington St.	VSO and Outreach teams	Chicago-based claims assistance, outreach events, community appointments, partner coordination, and movement of approved materials and equipment.
Ford T350 Medium-Roof Wagon	Rolling Meadows Regional Office 2121 Euclid Ave.	VSO and Outreach teams; authorized Veteran transportation	Northwest regional operations and scheduled transportation of eligible Veterans to headquarters for emergency financial-assistance access.

LOCATION-BASED DEPLOYMENT

VACCC Headquarters - Bronco Sport and Maverick XLT

The Ford Bronco Sport and one Ford Maverick XLT will be housed at VACCC Headquarters at 1100 S. Hamilton Avenue. These vehicles will operate as shared resources for accredited VSO's, the Communications and Outreach team, the Finance team, the Superintendent, and Deputy. Central assignment will allow headquarters to maintain dependable coverage for both scheduled travel and time-sensitive operational needs.

- **Veteran Service Officer support.** Travel to off-site appointments, community-based claims clinics, partner facilities, and regional service locations; transport of authorized equipment and non-sensitive materials needed for claims assistance.
- **Outreach operations.** Deployment to Veteran events, municipal and township locations, VSOs, shelters, senior facilities, colleges, and underserved communities across Cook County.

- **Finance and administrative operations.** Official travel for banking, procurement, payment or document coordination, inventory needs, site support, and other authorized business functions that cannot be completed electronically.
- **Executive leadership.** Travel by the Superintendent and Deputy for County meetings, Executive Board and membership activities, site oversight, governmental and community partnerships, incident response, and representation of the VACCC at official events.

Maintaining two vehicles at headquarters will also provide continuity when simultaneous assignments arise or when one vehicle is unavailable because of maintenance, inspection, or another authorized use. Dispatch will be based on operational priority, vehicle suitability, staff availability, and service urgency.

Chicago Regional Office - Maverick XLT

The second Ford Maverick XLT will be housed at the Chicago Regional Office at 69 W. Washington Street. It will primarily support the VSO and Outreach teams serving the City of Chicago and nearby communities. Locating a vehicle at this office will allow staff to deploy directly from the regional site instead of traveling to headquarters merely to obtain transportation, thereby reducing lost staff time and improving scheduling efficiency.

The vehicle will support claims appointments, outreach events, benefits presentations, partner visits, field-based Veteran engagement, and the transport of approved outreach materials, technology, and supplies. It will also improve the office's ability to respond when a Veteran cannot easily reach the downtown location or when a community partner identifies a need for on-site VACCC support.

Rolling Meadows Regional Office - Ford T350

The Ford T350 medium-roof wagon will be housed at the Rolling Meadows Regional Office at 2121 Euclid Avenue. Its passenger and cargo capacity make it the most appropriate vehicle for northwest regional outreach, mobile VSO operations,

transportation of equipment and supplies, and scheduled transportation assistance for eligible Veterans.

Until the VACCC completes implementation of its comprehensive digitization and electronic case-management solution, certain emergency financial-assistance services will remain centered at headquarters because staff must access secure records and established processing functions. The T350 will help bridge that temporary geographic gap by transporting Veterans from the Rolling Meadows service area to the VACCC Headquarters when in-person access is necessary and other safe, appropriate transportation is not reasonably available.

Veteran transportation will be provided through an approved scheduling and eligibility process and will be coordinated around staffing, vehicle availability, safety requirements, and program capacity. The T350 may also support group transportation for approved VACCC programming or service access when permissible, while preserving its primary role in regional VSO and outreach operations.

Model Year	Vehicle Make	Vehicle Model
2026	Ford	Bronco Sport
2026	Ford	Maverick XLT
2026	Ford	Maverick XLT
2026	Ford	T350 MED ROOF WAGON AWD

Figure 1. FY27 VACCC fleet inventory: one Ford Bronco Sport, two Ford Maverick XLT vehicles, and one Ford T350 medium-roof wagon.

FLEET MANAGEMENT, SAFETY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The FY27 implementation year will establish clear operating practices to protect County assets, ensure appropriate use, and generate reliable evidence of service impact. The VACCC will coordinate with applicable Cook County departments and follow all County vehicle, insurance, risk-management, fuel, maintenance, licensing, and driver-authorization requirements.

- **Centralized scheduling and dispatch.** Each location will use an approved reservation or dispatch process that identifies the authorized driver, date, destination, business purpose, expected return, and vehicle assigned.
- **Driver authorization and safety.** Only approved personnel who meet County requirements will operate vehicles. Staff will complete required orientation, safety training, and incident-reporting procedures.
- **Pre- and post-use inspections.** Drivers will document mileage, fuel level, condition, cleanliness, and any safety or maintenance concern before and after use.
- **Preventive maintenance.** Service schedules, inspections, registrations, recalls, repairs, and downtime will be tracked to preserve reliability and useful life.
- **Appropriate use and confidentiality.** Vehicles will be restricted to authorized official business. Protected records and sensitive Veteran information will not be left unsecured in any vehicle.
- **Transportation safeguards.** Veteran trips will be scheduled, documented, and conducted under approved safety, accessibility, passenger-conduct, emergency, and capacity procedures.

FY27 PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

FY27 will serve as the VACCC's fleet implementation and baseline year. The Commission will collect consistent utilization and outcome data to determine whether vehicles are appropriately distributed, whether the fleet is reducing service barriers, and where additional capacity may be justified. This evidence will create a defensible foundation for any FY28 request to expand the VACCC fleet.

MEASURE	WHAT WILL BE TRACKED	FY28 DECISION VALUE
Utilization	Trips, miles, service days, reservation demand, users, destinations, and purpose by vehicle and location.	Shows actual use, peak demand, geographic coverage, and whether vehicles are correctly assigned.
Veteran access	Veterans transported, completed HQ trips, appointments supported, communities reached, and service barriers addressed.	Connects fleet activity directly to Veteran outcomes and equitable access.
Program support	VSO appointments, outreach events, partner visits, financial/administrative trips, and leadership assignments supported.	Demonstrates how vehicles improve multiple VACCC functions rather than a single program.
Efficiency	Mileage reimbursement avoided, staff time saved, canceled or deferred trips, vehicle downtime, fuel, and maintenance costs.	Supports a cost-and-capacity comparison for fleet expansion decisions.
Unmet demand	Reservation conflicts, trips declined, delayed assignments, insufficient passenger/cargo capacity, and areas lacking coverage.	Identifies precise gaps that an FY28 vehicle request would address.

Projected Impact

The FY27 fleet will enhance the VACCC's ability to meet Veterans where they are, provide more consistent community-based claims and outreach services, connect northwest suburban Veterans to emergency financial assistance at headquarters, and support the daily operations of a growing county-wide agency. It will also strengthen staff safety, scheduling reliability, and accountability by placing official transportation resources under a coordinated fleet-management structure.

Most importantly, FY27 will provide the Commission with measurable proof of usage. Trip records, Veteran outcomes, geographic coverage, unmet requests, operating costs, and staff-efficiency data will allow Cook County decision-makers to evaluate the value of the fleet and determine whether a targeted FY28 investment in additional vehicles is warranted.

The implementation of the VACCC's first strategically distributed vehicle fleet is an essential component of its transition to a regional service-delivery model. Assigning vehicles to headquarters, the Chicago Regional Office, and the Rolling Meadows Office will improve mobility, reduce barriers, and expand the Commission's ability to respond to Veterans throughout Cook County.

Through careful oversight, safe operating practices, and transparent performance measurement, the VACCC will ensure that each vehicle is used efficiently and directly supports the mission. The FY27 results will establish the operational record and evidence-based foundation necessary to assess future fleet needs and present a responsible FY28 expansion request.

X. PROGRAMS



VETERAN SERVICE OFFICER (VSO) PROGRAM

Executive Summary

The VACCC's FY27 VSO Program Budget proposal represents a strategic investment in the workforce, leadership, and operational infrastructure necessary to build a sustainable countywide Veteran service delivery system. The proposal would expand the Veteran Service Officer Program from six authorized VSO positions to seventeen total, fill the existing Veteran Service Manager vacancy to complete the North and South Regional Leadership Model, and establish a Bureau Chief of Veteran Services to provide dedicated executive leadership and organizational oversight. The need for this investment is demonstrated by the Program's FY26 performance. Despite operating with only one fully accredited VSO for most of the first half of the fiscal year, the Program represented **1,224 Veterans**, completed **2,292 claim actions**, and generated more than **\$12.44 million in recurring annual VA compensation**. Between the first and second quarters, every major performance indicator

increased, including a **38 percent increase in total claim actions**, a **104 percent increase in retroactive benefits awarded**, and a **32 percent increase in recurring annual compensation generated**.

The proposed FY27 organizational model builds upon this demonstrated performance by expanding accredited representation, establishing regional operational leadership, and creating centralized executive oversight. At full projected capacity, the Commission estimates the ability to serve more than **13,000 Veterans annually**, complete approximately **24,808 claim actions**, and facilitate **approximately \$127.96 million in recurring annual VA compensation** through accredited representation. These projections represent operational capacity based on demonstrated FY26 performance and assume that proposed positions are successfully hired, trained, accredited, and integrated into the regional service delivery model.

This investment is designed to accomplish more than increasing staffing levels. The FY27 proposal establishes the organizational structure necessary to standardize operating procedures, strengthen quality assurance, improve accreditation oversight, expand employee training and professional development, improve performance management, and increase access to VetConnect Office Hours, Claims Clinics, and other community-based services throughout Cook County.

Ultimately, the FY27 Budget positions the VACCC to transform a high-performing but capacity-constrained program into a coordinated, scalable, and accountable countywide service system. By investing in accredited staff, regional management, and dedicated executive leadership, Cook County can expand access to earned federal benefits, strengthen the financial stability of Veteran households, and increase the flow of federally funded resources into communities throughout the County.

Expanding Access to Accredited Veteran Services - VSO Program at a Glance

Measure	Current FY26	FY27 Request	FY27 Total / Capacity
Authorized Veteran Service Officers	6	+8	14
Accredited Veteran Service Officers Available	1 (Most of Q1 & Q2)	+13	14
Veterans Represented	1,224 (Q1 & Q2)	Expanded Operational Capacity	13,000+ Annually
Total Claim Actions	2,292 (Q1 & Q2)	+22,516	24,808 Annually
Annual VA Compensation Generated	\$12.44 Million	+\$115.52 Million	\$127.96 Million Annually
Operational Service Delivery	Limited by Accredited Coverage	North & South Regional Expansion	Countywide Regional Service Delivery Model

Note: Although six Veteran Service Officer positions were authorized during FY26, Department of Veterans Affairs accreditation is obtained individually after training and federal approval. During most of Q1 and Q2, one Veteran Service Officer independently provided accredited representation while additional staff supported intake, evidence development, claims preparation, records requests, Veteran assistance, and accreditation training.

FY27 Objectives

- Expand accredited VSO capacity from 6 authorized positions to 17 positions total
- Increase appointment availability throughout Cook County
- Reduce wait times for accredited representation
- Expand recurring VetConnect Office Hours and Claims Clinics
- Increase access to specialized Veteran services
- Return substantially more federally funded benefits to Cook County Veterans
- Build a sustainable countywide Veteran service delivery model capable of meeting increasing demand

Program Overview

The VSO Program is one of the primary service delivery functions of the Veterans Assistance Commission and serves as the gateway through which Veterans and their eligible dependents access the federal, state, and local benefits they earned through military service. Accredited VSO's provide professional representation before the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) by assisting Veterans with disability compensation, pension benefits, healthcare enrollment, survivor benefits, education benefits, appeals, military records requests, and comprehensive benefits counseling.

Unlike many public assistance programs, the majority of benefits secured through accredited Veteran representation are federally funded. Every successful claim brings additional federal resources into Cook County, strengthening household financial stability while improving access to healthcare, housing, education, and other essential services at no additional cost to Cook County taxpayers. The VSO Program represents one of the County's highest-return investments by transforming local operational resources into long-term federal financial support for Veterans and their families.

These benefits – including monthly tax-free disability compensation and pension payments, home loan benefits, education assistance, survivor benefits, and access to healthcare – support not only individual Veterans and their families but also the communities in which they live and spend those resources. Simply put, expanding access to earned Veteran benefits improves economic outcomes, promotes long-term financial stability, and brings additional federal investment into communities throughout Cook County. As the Commission's primary operational program, the VSO Program serves as the foundation of countywide Veteran service delivery. Every major initiative, including Community Outreach, VetConnect Office Hours, Claims Clinics, and community partnerships, is designed to connect Veterans with accredited representation and the benefits they have earned through military service.

Why Accredited Representation Matters

The VA benefits system is governed by complex federal laws, regulations, evidentiary standards, and administrative procedures. Successfully navigating this system requires specialized training, professional experience, and federal accreditation. Accredited Veteran Service Officers help Veterans navigate these requirements by providing professional representation and guidance throughout every stage of the claims process. Veterans attempting to navigate the system on their own may encounter administrative obstacles, submit incomplete or improperly developed claims, misunderstand evidentiary requirements, or remain unaware of benefits for which they may be eligible. By working with an accredited VSO, Veterans gain an experienced advocate who can identify potential benefits, develop supporting evidence, prepare and submit claims, monitor their progress, and respond to issues that arise during adjudication.

While no representative can guarantee an outcome or processing timeline, effective VSO representation can reduce avoidable delays and administrative errors while making an otherwise complex and potentially lengthy process significantly more manageable. By ensuring that claims are properly developed and supported from the outset, VSO's help Veterans pursue the benefits they have earned as efficiently and effectively as possible.

These services include:

- Disability Compensation Claims
- Pension Claims
- VA Health Care Enrollment
- Education Benefits
- Survivor and Dependency Benefits
- Higher-Level Reviews
- Supplemental Claims
- Appeals before the Board of Veterans' Appeals
- Military Records Requests
- Military Discharge Upgrade Referrals
- Benefits Counseling
- Community Resource Referrals
- Comprehensive Case Management and Long-Term Benefits Planning

These services require federally accredited Veteran Service Officers operating within a structured system of supervision, quality assurance, continuing education, and standardized operating procedures. The FY27 organizational structure is designed to ensure these services remain consistent, professional, and available throughout Cook County.

Accredited representation improves claim quality, reduces avoidable delays, preserves effective dates, and increases the likelihood that Veterans receive every benefit to which they are legally entitled. Every successful claim represents more than a completed application. It strengthens Veteran households, improves financial stability, increases access to healthcare, and returns federally funded resources to Cook County communities.

The Capacity Challenge

Although six Veteran Service Officer positions are authorized, the Commission's ability to provide accredited representation is determined by the number of fully trained and federally accredited VSO's available to independently represent Veterans before the Department of Veterans Affairs. While non-accredited staff provide critical support through intake, evidence development, claims preparation, records requests, and Veteran assistance, accredited VSO's remain responsible for direct representation and serve as the primary drivers of claims production.

During most of the first half of FY26, the Program operated with only one VSO independently authorized to provide accredited representation, creating a significant constraint on overall operational capacity. At the same time, demand for accredited Veteran services continues to increase throughout Cook County. Expanded Communications and Outreach initiatives, recurring VetConnect Office Hours, Claims Clinics, community partnerships, and increased public awareness are connecting more Veterans with the Commission and generating greater demand for professional claims assistance.

As demand continues to grow, expanding accredited staffing is essential to maintain manageable workloads, reduce appointment wait times, expand countywide access, and support the Commission's proposed North and South regional service delivery model. Accredited representation has therefore become the Program's primary operational constraint and the central focus of the proposed FY27 expansion.

FY26 Performance Summary

The first half of FY26 demonstrated that the VSO Program can deliver measurable, repeatable results despite operating significantly below its intended staffing capacity. Limited accredited staffing did not prevent continued growth in production, service delivery, or Veteran outcomes. Instead, it highlighted the strength of the Commission's operational model and the opportunity for even greater impact through strategic investment in personnel.

As mentioned previously, for most of the reporting period, accredited representation before the VA was performed by a single fully accredited Veteran Service Officer. Even with this limitation, the Program increased production across every major performance measure while expanding access to accredited representation and returning millions of dollars in federally funded benefits to Cook County Veterans. These results demonstrate that the Program has established an effective, repeatable service delivery model capable of supporting future expansion.

Performance Dashboard

Performance Measure	FY26 Q1	FY26 Q2	Growth
Veterans Represented	549	675	+23%
Powers of Attorney Established	319	390	+22%
Intent to File Submitted	294	410	+39%
New Disability Compensation Claims Filed	203	288	+42%
Higher-Level Reviews & Supplemental Appeals	147	234	+59%
Total Claim Actions Completed	963	1,329	+38%
Retroactive VA Benefits Awarded	\$311,799	\$636,068	+104%
Annual VA Compensation Generated	\$9.39 Million	\$12.44 Million	+32%

Note: Every major operational measure improved between the first and second quarters of FY26, demonstrating sustained growth in both demand for accredited representation and the Program's ability to respond effectively despite limited operational capacity.

Operational Trends

The first half of FY26 demonstrates consistent growth across every major performance indicator, reflecting increased demand for accredited Veteran services and strong operational performance despite limited accredited staffing.

- **22 percent growth** in Powers of Attorney (POAs) established, demonstrating increased trust in accredited representation. POAs allow VSOs to formally represent Veterans before the VA, access claim information, monitor cases, and advocate on their behalf.
- **39 percent growth** in Intent to File (ITF) submissions, helping Veterans preserve an earlier potential effective date while they gather evidence and prepare a complete claim. This protection can result in significantly greater retroactive compensation when benefits are awarded.

- **42 percent growth** in new disability compensation claims, reflecting increased demand for accredited claims assistance. These claims are the primary mechanism through which Veterans seek disability compensation and pension benefits from the VA.
- **59 percent growth** in Higher-Level Reviews and Supplemental Claims, indicating increased demand for representation in complex or previously denied cases.
- **38 percent growth** in total claim actions completed despite limited accredited staffing, demonstrating increased productivity across the claims lifecycle. These actions help move cases forward through evidence development, submissions, reviews, and other necessary interventions.
- **104 percent growth** in retroactive VA benefits awarded, providing Veterans and their families with past-due compensation owed from established effective dates.
- **32 percent growth** in recurring annual VA compensation generated, expanding the amount of long-term federal financial support entering Veteran households and Cook County communities.

These improvements occurred while maintaining continuity of operations, supporting Veterans throughout the claims and appeals process, and continuing to expand countywide access to accredited services.

Measuring Success Beyond Production

While operational metrics measure workload and productivity, the true measure of the VSO Program's success is the long-term impact that each successful claim can have on a Veteran, their family, and the surrounding community. Access to earned benefits can increase household income, improve financial stability, expand access to healthcare, strengthen housing security, create new educational opportunities, and establish eligibility for additional federal and state programs. For Veterans and their dependents, these benefits can provide lasting economic security and improve overall quality of life.

The impact also extends beyond the individual Veteran. Every successful claim has the potential to bring additional federal resources into Cook County, where recurring compensation, education benefits, housing assistance, and other forms of support circulate through local communities. By connecting Veterans and their families with the benefits they have earned, the program strengthens individual households while contributing to broader economic stability throughout Cook County.

Expanding Operational Capacity to Meet Veteran Demand

FY27 Operational Expansion Plan and Objectives

During much of FY26, the VSO Program operated **below its authorized staffing level**. Although six Veteran Service Officer positions were authorized, the Commission did not have six fully staffed and accredited VSOs available throughout the reporting period. Despite these staffing limitations, the Program continued to expand services, increase production, and generate more than **\$12.44 million in recurring annual VA compensation during the second quarter alone**. The FY27 request first completes the Commission's existing staffing model and then expands operational capacity to meet growing countywide demand.

The FY27 investment will:

- Complete staffing of the **eight currently authorized Veteran Service Officer positions**.
- Expand the VSO Program by adding **nine additional Veteran Service Officer positions, increasing the Commission from eight authorized positions to 17 authorized positions total**.
- Establish one **Bureau Chief of Veteran Services** to provide executive leadership, strategic planning, and Commission-wide oversight.
- Fill the existing **Veteran Service Manager vacancy**, completing the North and South Regional Leadership Model.

- Expand VetConnect Office Hours, Claims Clinics, and community-based service delivery throughout Cook County.
- Improve quality assurance, accreditation oversight, workforce development, and operational consistency, and reduce appointment wait-times.
- Increase projected annual operational capacity to an estimated **24,808 claim actions** while serving a projected **13,000+ Veterans annually**.
- Facilitate approximately **\$127.96 million in projected annual VA compensation** through expanded accredited representation.

Current FY26	FY27 Request	FY27 Total
6 Authorized Veteran Service Officer Positions (not fully staffed and accredited during much of FY26)	Fill existing vacancies and add 8 Veteran Service Officer positions	14 Authorized Veteran Service Officers
No Bureau Chief	+1 Bureau Chief	Commission-wide Executive Leadership
2 Authorized Veteran Service Managers (1 Filled)	Fill 1 Existing Vacancy	2 Regional Veteran Service Managers
Limited Operational Capacity	Expand staffing and regional operations	Countywide Regional Service Delivery Model

Note: The results achieved during FY26 were accomplished while operating below the Commission's intended staffing model. The FY27 investment builds upon that demonstrated performance by completing existing staffing, expanding accredited representation, strengthening leadership, and establishing the organizational capacity needed to meet increasing demand for Veteran services throughout Cook County.

Projected Operational Capacity

Using demonstrated production from the first two quarters of FY26, projected operational capacity was calculated under two staffing models. The first reflects all currently authorized VSO positions being filled. The second reflects the proposed FY27 organizational structure.

Performance Measure	FY26 Actual (Q1 & Q2)	Projected Annual Capacity (6 Authorized VSOs)	Projected Annual Capacity (14 Proposed VSOs)
Powers of Attorney Established	709	3,120	7,280
Intent to File Submitted	704	3,280	7,653
New Disability Compensation Claims	491	2,304	5,376
Higher-Level Reviews & Supplemental Appeals	381	1,872	4,368
Total Claim Actions	2,292	10,632	24,808
Annual VA Compensation Generated	\$12.44 Million	\$54.73 Million	\$127.96 Million

***Projection Methodology:** Projected annual capacity is based on demonstrated FY26 operational performance during the first and second quarters and assumes comparable productivity by fully trained and accredited VSO. The **"8 Authorized VSO's"** scenario assumes all eight currently authorized positions are filled and fully accredited for an entire fiscal year. The **"9 Proposed VSO's"** scenario assumes approval of the FY27 staffing request, all proposed positions are hired and accredited, and the Commission's North and South regional operating model is fully implemented. Projections are intended to illustrate operational capacity under each staffing model and should not be interpreted as guaranteed outcomes.

Risks Without FY27 Investment

Demand for accredited Veteran representation will continue to increase regardless of available staffing. Without approval of the proposed operational expansion:

- Appointment wait times are expected to increase.
- Expansion of VetConnect Office Hours will remain limited.
- Growth of Claims Clinics will be constrained.
- Regional service delivery will be delayed.
- Existing staff will continue operating near maximum capacity, greatly increasing the chance of burnout and turnover.
- Opportunities to return additional federal benefits to Cook County Veterans will become limited.

The Program has already demonstrated what it can accomplish with limited resources. Without additional operational capacity, future growth will be constrained by available personnel rather than Veteran demand.

Preparing for Sustainable Growth

The proposed FY27 operational expansion is designed to build long-term capacity rather than simply increase staffing. The requested investment establishes the workforce necessary to meet current demand while positioning the VSO Program for continued growth, expanded countywide access, and improved service delivery over the coming years. The following chapter demonstrates how expanding operational capacity produces measurable financial returns for Veterans, strengthens household financial stability, and increases the amount of federally funded resources flowing into Cook County communities.

Return on Investment and Community Impact

Expected Outcomes

- Increase federally funded benefits returned to Cook County.
- Improve financial stability for Veteran households.
- Reduce barriers to healthcare and earned benefits.
- Expand countywide access to accredited representation.
- Strengthen partnerships throughout Cook County.
- Reduce reliance on emergency financial assistance by connecting Veterans to sustainable federal resources.
- Improve long-term quality of life for Veterans and their families.

Financial Impact

During the first half of FY26, accredited Veteran representation generated:

- **\$947,867** in retroactive VA benefits.
- More than **\$12.44** million in recurring annual VA compensation.
- Thousands of claim actions supporting Veterans and their families.

Under the proposed FY27 staffing model, the VSO Program is projected to support:

- Projected annual capacity of **24,808 claim actions**.
- Approximately **13,000** Veterans receiving accredited representation annually.
- Projected annual VA compensation of approximately **\$127.96 million facilitated through accredited representation**.

These projections demonstrate how increasing operational capacity directly increases the amount of federally funded resources flowing into Cook County.

Return on Investment and Community Impact

The VACCC VSO Program represents one of the highest-return public investments available to Cook County. Unlike many publicly funded programs, the majority of benefits secured through accredited Veteran representation are funded by the federal government rather than local tax revenue. Every successful claim, pension award, survivor benefit, or healthcare enrollment brings additional federal resources into Cook County while improving household income, housing stability, healthcare access, educational opportunities, and long-term financial security for Veterans and their families.

The proposed FY27 investment will expand accredited representation, VetConnect Office Hours, Claims Clinics, specialized Veteran programs, and partnerships with municipalities, hospitals, educational institutions, and Veteran organizations throughout Cook County. By improving access in underserved communities and increasing awareness of earned benefits, the Program will connect more Veterans and their families with sustainable federal resources, reduce reliance on emergency assistance, and increase economic activity within local communities. In this way, every successful claim represents more than an individual benefit – it strengthens Veteran households, local neighborhoods, and the broader Cook County economy.

Looking Forward – What these New Positions Mean

Justifications of New Leadership Positions

The proposed organizational structure would transition the Commission from a model of shared operational oversight to one supported by dedicated executive leadership and standardized Commission-wide management systems. This structure would establish consistent quality assurance procedures across all divisions, create a formal training and professional development program for VSO staff, and implement standardized performance metrics and reporting. Together, these improvements would strengthen organizational accountability, ensure consistency in service delivery, and provide the leadership and administrative infrastructure necessary to support continued countywide growth.

Bureau Chief of Veteran Services

Executive Leadership for a Countywide VSO Program

The FY27 Budget requests funding for one Bureau Chief of Veteran Services to provide executive leadership, strategic direction, and organizational oversight for the VSO Program. As the Commission expands in staffing, operational complexity, and countywide service delivery, dedicated executive leadership is essential to ensure consistent operations, accountability, quality assurance, and long-term organizational planning. The Bureau Chief provides full-time executive leadership for Commission operations, allowing the Superintendent to focus on agency-wide administration, strategic initiatives, external partnerships, and executive oversight.

As the Commission expands in staffing, service delivery, and operational complexity, dedicated executive leadership becomes essential to maintain organizational consistency, accountability, and strategic direction to ensure growth occurs in a structured, consistent, and accountable manner. The Bureau Chief will provide strategic direction for all VSO operations while ensuring standardized practices, measurable performance, workforce development, and continuous improvement throughout the Commission.

Expected Outcomes

- Establish Commission-wide executive leadership and accountability.
- Provide executive oversight for 14 authorized Veteran Service Officer positions.
- Direct 2 regional Veteran Service Managers and support the North and South Regional Leadership Model.
- Implement standardized operating procedures across all VSO operations.
- Implement a Commission-wide quality assurance and claims review program.
- Establish standardized performance reporting and operational metrics.
- Develop and oversee a countywide VSO training and accreditation program.
- Coordinate strategic planning, policy implementation, and operational improvement initiatives.
- Support an operational capacity of approximately **24,808 annual claim actions**.
- Support the Commission's capacity to facilitate approximately **\$127.96 million in annual VA compensation** through accredited representation.

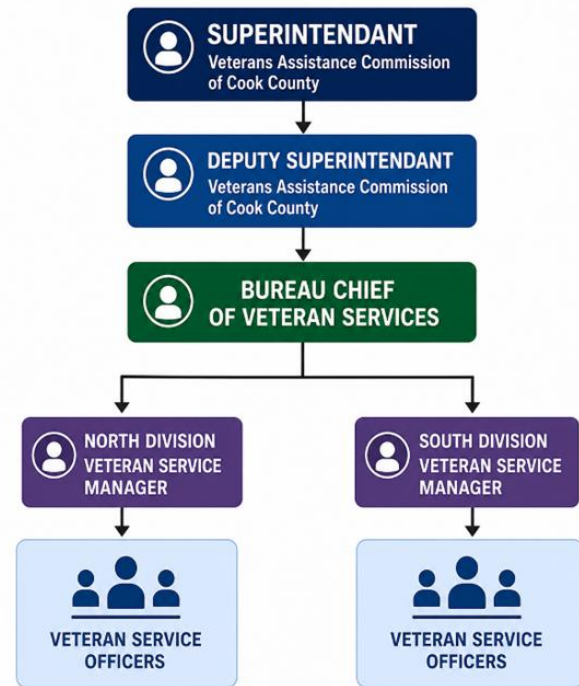
Executive Responsibilities and Organizational Impact

The Bureau Chief would provide centralized executive leadership for the VSO Program, ensuring that its divisions, managers, and Veteran Service Officers operate within a coordinated and accountable organizational structure. The position would direct Commission operations, establish strategic priorities, coordinate initiatives across departments and regional divisions, and ensure that organizational growth remains aligned with the VACCC's broader mission and long-term objectives.

A central responsibility of the Bureau Chief would be establishing consistent operating standards across the Commission. This includes standardizing procedures, overseeing Commission-wide quality assurance, monitoring organizational performance, ensuring consistent policy implementation, and identifying opportunities for operational improvement. Centralized oversight would help ensure that Veterans receive consistent, high-quality services regardless of which office, regional division, or VSO provides assistance.

The Bureau Chief would also strengthen workforce development by supervising regional leadership, supporting recruitment and retention efforts, coordinating Commission-wide training, and developing long-term succession plans. As the Commission grows, a standardized approach to training and professional development will be necessary to ensure that new and existing staff receive consistent instruction, maintain professional competency, and have opportunities for continued advancement within the organization.

Organizational Leadership Model



Compliance and accreditation oversight would remain another critical executive responsibility. The Bureau Chief would ensure that accredited staff maintain required standards, that internal policies are consistently implemented, and that performance expectations are clearly established and monitored. This would create a more structured system of accountability while allowing Veteran Service Managers to focus primarily on staff supervision, case consultation, employee development, and the daily delivery of Veteran services.

Why Executive Leadership Is Needed

The VACCC has evolved beyond a structure that can be effectively managed through distributed operational oversight alone. The proposed FY27 organizational model expands the VSO Program from six authorized Veteran Service Officers to fourteen positions while implementing North and South regional divisions. Without dedicated executive leadership, critical administrative, oversight, and organizational responsibilities become fragmented

across operational managers and the existing executive team. This requires managers to divide their attention between supervising employees, managing daily service delivery, resolving operational issues, developing organizational policy, and supporting long-term strategic planning. Over time, this structure can limit management capacity, create inconsistencies between locations/teams, and make it more difficult to maintain Commission-wide accountability and coordination.

Establishing dedicated executive leadership would provide clear responsibility for organizational oversight, quality assurance, performance management, policy implementation, and coordination across divisions. This structure would allow operational managers to focus more effectively on supervising staff, improving service delivery, and managing their respective programs, while senior leadership can concentrate on long-term strategy, organizational development, intergovernmental relationships, and the continued expansion of services throughout Cook County.

Return on Investment and Expected Outcomes

The Bureau Chief would not directly process claims or maintain an individual caseload. Instead, the position would increase the effectiveness of the entire VSO Program by ensuring that VSO's, managers, and regional divisions operate within one coordinated system focused on consistency, accountability, quality, and measurable outcomes.

This investment becomes increasingly important as the VACCC expands its workforce and countywide service delivery. Dedicated executive leadership would provide the organizational capacity necessary to support expansion to fourteen Veteran Service Officers, standardize operations across the North and South Divisions, strengthen quality assurance and accreditation oversight, improve workforce development and employee retention, and establish consistent performance management and reporting systems.

By creating centralized leadership and clear organizational accountability, the Bureau Chief would also allow regional and operational managers to remain focused on their core responsibilities: supervising employees, improving service delivery, resolving complex Veteran cases, and supporting the professional development of frontline staff. At the same time, executive leadership would maintain responsibility for Commission-wide strategy, policy implementation, workforce planning, performance management, and organizational development.

Ultimately, the Bureau Chief represents an investment in the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the VSO Program. By strengthening leadership capacity, improving operational consistency, and establishing systems capable of supporting continued growth, the position would protect the County's investment in expanded Veteran services while supporting increased claims production, improved service quality, and the continued return of federally funded benefits to Veterans and families throughout Cook County.

Veteran Service Managers

Regional Leadership for Countywide Veteran Service Delivery

The FY27 Budget requests funding to fill one existing vacant Veteran Service Manager position, completing the Commission's North and South Regional Leadership Model. This investment will establish dedicated operational leadership for both geographic divisions, ensuring that VSO's receive consistent supervision, technical guidance, professional development, workload management, and quality assurance oversight throughout the VSO Program.

As the VSO Program expands from six authorized Veteran Service Officer positions to fourteen, the Commission's supervisory structure must grow alongside its frontline workforce. The VSO Program is organized into North and South Divisions to place operational leadership closer to employees, service locations, and the Veterans receiving

assistance. Each Veteran Service Manager will serve as the operational leader of an assigned region and provide direct oversight of daily service delivery, employee performance, claims quality, and regional operations.

The regional management model establishes a clear division of responsibility between executive and operational leadership. The Bureau Chief of Veteran Services will provide Commission-wide executive leadership, strategic direction, policy oversight, and organizational planning, while the Veteran Service Managers will translate those priorities into consistent daily operations within their respective divisions.

Expected Outcomes

- Complete the North and South Regional Leadership Model.
- Provide direct supervision and operational support for 14 authorized VSO positions.
- Establish manageable spans of supervision across two geographic divisions.
- Standardize regional claims development and service delivery practices.
- Implement routine case reviews and regional quality assurance procedures.
- Strengthen employee coaching, mentoring, and professional development.
- Improve workload distribution and responsiveness to changing service demands.
- Coordinate regional VetConnect Office Hours, Claims Clinics, and other accredited service initiatives.
- Support accreditation compliance and continuing professional education.
- Monitor regional performance and ensure consistent implementation of Commission policies.
- Support an operational capacity of approximately **24,808 annual claim actions**.
- Strengthen the Commission's capacity to facilitate approximately **\$127.96 million in annual VA compensation** through accredited representation.

Regional Responsibilities and Organizational Impact

Veteran Service Managers will provide direct operational leadership for the VSO assigned to their respective divisions. Their responsibilities will include employee supervision, technical claims guidance, workload management, complex case consultation, performance monitoring, quality assurance, and the coordination of regional service delivery. A central responsibility of each Manager will be maintaining the quality and consistency of accredited

representation. Managers will conduct routine case reviews, provide guidance on complex claims and appeals, identify recurring documentation or procedural issues, and ensure that Veteran Service Officers consistently follow Commission policies and professional standards. This oversight will help reduce avoidable errors, strengthen claims development, and ensure Veterans receive consistent representation regardless of which VSO or service location assists them.

Veteran Service Managers will also serve as the primary source of professional development and technical support for frontline staff. Through regular coaching, case consultation, performance feedback, and coordination of continuing education, Managers will help newly accredited employees develop professional competency while ensuring experienced staff continue to strengthen their technical knowledge and claims development skills.

Regional leadership will also improve the Commission's ability to manage workloads and respond to changing service demands. Managers will monitor caseloads, claim activity, appointment availability, and regional service needs to distribute work more effectively and identify emerging operational challenges. This structure will allow the Commission to adjust staffing and service delivery more quickly while maintaining consistent standards across both divisions.

Why Regional Leadership Is Needed

The proposed FY27 organizational structure expands the VSO Program from six authorized Veteran Service Officers to fourteen positions. As the number of frontline employees, service locations, outreach initiatives, and annual claim actions increases, effective supervision requires a management structure capable of providing accessible and consistent day-to-day leadership.

A single centralized supervisory structure would create an increasingly difficult span of control and concentrate routine operational decisions at the executive level. Without dedicated regional leadership, employee questions, complex case reviews, workload decisions, performance concerns, and quality assurance responsibilities can become bottlenecks, reducing responsiveness and limiting the amount of individualized coaching available to Veteran Service Officers.

Dividing operational leadership between North and South Regional Managers creates manageable supervisory teams and places decision-making closer to where services are delivered. This improves leadership accessibility, allows operational issues to be resolved more quickly, strengthens employee development, and creates greater accountability for regional performance.

The regional structure also creates a necessary distinction between strategic and operational leadership. The Bureau Chief will remain responsible for Commission-wide strategy, policy, performance management, organizational development, and long-term planning, while Veteran Service Managers focus on employee supervision, claims quality, workload management, and daily service delivery. This structure prevents executive leadership from becoming consumed by routine supervisory responsibilities while ensuring frontline employees receive the consistent support necessary to perform effectively.

Return on Investment and Expected Outcomes

Veteran Service Managers do not primarily increase claims production by maintaining individual caseloads. Instead, they increase the effectiveness of every Veteran Service Officer under their supervision by improving claims quality, strengthening employee competency, balancing workloads, resolving complex cases, and identifying operational problems before they negatively affect Veterans or organizational performance.

This investment is particularly important as the County expands its frontline VSO workforce. Increasing the number of Veteran Service Officers without corresponding supervisory capacity would risk inconsistent service delivery, uneven employee development, reduced quality assurance, and operational bottlenecks. Completing the regional leadership structure protects the County's investment in expanded staffing by ensuring that employees receive the supervision, technical guidance, and professional support necessary to operate effectively.

With two fully staffed regional divisions, Veteran Service Managers will increase leadership availability, improve coaching and professional development, strengthen claims review procedures, improve workload distribution, and support consistent implementation of Commission policies. The structure will also improve the Commission's ability to coordinate VetConnect Office Hours, Claims Clinics, and other countywide service initiatives by establishing clear regional responsibility for planning and execution.

The regional management model will support the Commission's projected operational capacity of approximately 24,808 annual claim actions by ensuring that increased claims production is supported by effective supervision and quality oversight. As claim volume and complexity increase, regional leadership will help maintain professional standards while supporting continued growth in the federal benefits secured for Cook County Veterans and their families. Ultimately, completing the North and South Regional Leadership Model represents an investment in sustainable organizational growth.

By placing operational leadership closer to employees and Veterans, the Commission can expand countywide access while maintaining consistent service standards, strengthening workforce development, improving operational responsiveness, and ensuring every Veteran receives timely and professional accredited representation regardless of where services are provided.

Building the Future of Veteran Services in Cook County

FY27 Strategic Vision

Strategic Vision

The FY27 Budget represents more than an investment in additional personnel. It establishes the organizational structure, leadership, and operational capacity necessary to build a modern, scalable VSO Program capable of meeting the growing needs of Cook County's 141,000 Veterans for years to come. The proposed organizational structure aligns leadership, regional operations, accredited representation, and community engagement into one coordinated service delivery model focused on measurable outcomes, accountability, and continuous improvement.

This investment positions the VACCC to expand access, improve operational efficiency, strengthen professional development, and deliver consistent, high-quality services throughout Cook County.

The FY27 Vision

Under the proposed organizational structure, the VACCC will operate as a fully integrated countywide service delivery system.

The Commission will provide:

- Executive leadership through the Bureau Chief of Veteran Services.
- Regional operational leadership through North and South Division Veteran Service Managers.
- Expanded accredited representation through fourteen Veteran Service Officers.
- Increased community access through recurring VetConnect Office Hours.
- Expanded Claims Clinics throughout Cook County.
- Stronger partnerships with municipalities, hospitals, educational institutions, Veteran Service Organizations, and community partners.
- Standardized operating procedures.
- Commission-wide quality assurance.
- Consistent employee development and leadership succession planning.

Investing in Veterans, Strengthening Communities

The FY27 Budget represents an investment in Veterans, families, leadership, and the operational capacity necessary to serve communities throughout Cook County. Every successful disability claim, pension award, survivor benefit, or healthcare enrollment represents more than an individual outcome – it strengthens household financial stability, provides greater security for Veteran families, and brings additional federal resources into communities throughout the County.

By expanding accredited staffing, strengthening regional leadership, and establishing dedicated executive oversight, the VACCC will be positioned to meet current demand while building the organizational capacity necessary for continued growth. This investment will expand access to professional accredited representation, improve the consistency and quality of services, and connect more Veterans and their families with the federal benefits they have earned through military service.

Approval of the FY27 Budget will establish the organizational foundation necessary to expand countywide access, maintain high standards of service, and prepare the Commission for future demand. By investing in the people and systems that connect Veterans with earned federal benefits, Cook County strengthens Veteran households, supports local communities, and promotes long-term economic stability throughout the region.



VACCC VETERAN FAIRWAYS PROGRAM

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County additionally proposes the development of a Veteran Health & Wellness Golf Initiative, a strategic pilot program designed to promote physical activity, mental well-being, social connection, and community engagement among Cook County Veterans through accessible participation in the game of golf.

The initiative would be implemented in partnership with Troon, participating Cook County golf facilities, and, where available, PGA Professionals instruction for beginners, and basic equipment support for Veterans who otherwise could not participate. During the initial pilot, the VACCC intends to establish programming/events at several (TBD) strategically located golf courses throughout Cook County, creating geographic access for Veterans residing in different portions of the County.

This initiative should not be viewed solely as a recreational golf benefit. Rather, it represents an opportunity to incorporate outdoor recreation, physical activity, peer engagement, skill development, and community connection into the VACCC's broader Veteran health and wellness strategy. The goal is simple: remove financial and experiential

barriers that may prevent Veterans from participating in a healthy outdoor activity while building opportunities for Veterans to connect with one another and with the broader Cook County community.

THE NEED FOR VETERAN HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAMMING

Veteran mental health and suicide prevention remain significant national public-health concerns. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' 2025 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, 6,398 Veterans died by suicide during calendar year 2023. Suicide prevention therefore requires not only crisis intervention and clinical treatment, but a broader network of protective factors that can support wellness, connection, purpose, physical activity, and engagement before a Veteran reaches a point of crisis.

The VACCC recognizes that a golf program is not a substitute for professional mental-health treatment, suicide-prevention services, or medical care. It can, however, serve as one component of a comprehensive Veteran wellness strategy by creating consistent opportunities for healthy activity, peer interaction, recreation, confidence building, and community engagement.

Physical activity itself is associated with important health benefits. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that regular physical activity can reduce feelings of anxiety, lower the risk of depression, improve sleep, support brain health, strengthen muscles and bones, and reduce risks associated with several chronic illnesses.

Outdoor activity may provide additional benefits. Research examining exposure to natural and green environments has identified associations with improved mental health, cognitive function, physical activity, sleep, blood pressure, and psychological restoration.

Golf uniquely brings many of these factors together within one activity:

Physical activity + outdoor exposure + social interaction + skill development + routine + personal accomplishment + community connection.

For Veterans who may be experiencing isolation, difficulty reconnecting socially, loss of military camaraderie, disability, stress, or challenges adjusting to civilian life, structured recreational opportunities can create an additional pathway toward engagement.

WHY GOLF FITS A VETERAN WELLNESS STRATEGY

Golf offers several characteristics that make it particularly appropriate for Veteran health and wellness programming. Unlike many competitive sports, golf can be adapted for different ages, experience levels, physical abilities, and levels of athletic conditioning. Veterans can participate recreationally, competitively, individually, or as part of a group. The game also provides opportunities for Veterans to spend several hours outdoors while walking, practicing controlled movement, concentrating on a task, interacting with peers, learning new skills, and developing personal goals.

Perhaps most importantly, golf can create something that cannot always be measured solely through the number of rounds played: a reason for Veterans to reconnect.

A scheduled tee time becomes an appointment with other Veterans. A golf clinic becomes an opportunity to develop a new skill. A County golf course can become another place where Veterans know that they belong. The VACCC believes these connections are valuable components of a broader strategy to address Veteran isolation and promote long-term wellness.

TROON PILOT PARTNERSHIP AND AFFORDABLE ACCESS MODEL

The VACCC has established a partnership with Troon to develop an affordable golf-access program that promotes wellness, recreation, and community engagement among

Cook County Veterans. Troon has expressed a willingness to work with the VACCC toward developing a structure specifically for Cook County Veterans. Under the proposed pilot, eligible Veterans could receive access to discounted rounds at participating facilities, subject to negotiated program parameters, designated tee-time availability, funding, and operational capacity.

Rather than the County carrying the entire cost of programming independently, this public-private partnership approach creates the potential to leverage existing golf infrastructure, available tee times, partner contributions, professional instruction, and philanthropic support.

The pilot will also provide the County with measurable data regarding:

- Veteran enrollment;
- geographic participation;
- number of rounds utilized;
- repeat participation;
- first-time golfers;
- instructional participation;
- Veteran satisfaction;
- equipment needs;
- program cost per Veteran;
- utilization by age group;
- participation by Veterans with disabilities;
- seasonal demand;
- partner contributions; and
- overall demand for expansion.

PGA PROFESSIONAL INSTRUCTION

One of the greatest barriers to entering the game of golf is not simply the cost of a round, it is knowing how to play. A Veteran who has never played golf should not have to purchase clubs, pay for lessons, understand golf etiquette, and independently navigate a golf course before being able to benefit from the program. Accordingly, the VACCC

intends to pursue partnerships with PGA Professionals to provide introductory instruction to Veterans with little or no previous golf experience.

Instruction would include:

- basic golf fundamentals;
- game instruction;
- driving-range sessions;
- equipment orientation;
- golf-course etiquette;
- introductory clinics;
- adaptive instruction where available; and

This component is critical to ensuring that the initiative serves Cook County Veterans who have never had access to golf, rather than becoming a benefit available primarily to Veterans who already play.

REMOVING THE EQUIPMENT BARRIER

Golf equipment represents another significant barrier to participation. A Veteran should not be excluded from a County wellness initiative because they cannot afford basic equipment. Subject to available funding, and program guidelines, the VACCC proposes developing a modest Veteran Golf Starter Kit for eligible first-time participants.

The VACCC would also explore donated or shared equipment programs through Troon, golf manufacturers, local businesses, Veteran organizations, charitable organizations, PGA partners, and individual donors. Equipment support could include basic items such as golf balls, tees, gloves, training materials, VACCC-branded wellness apparel, loaner clubs, or beginner equipment.

These materials would serve a functional purpose while also giving participating Veterans a tangible connection to the initiative and to the broader Cook County Veteran community.

BUILDING SOCIAL CONNECTION AND RECREATING CAMARADERIE

One of the most important potential outcomes of this initiative is social connection. Military service frequently creates strong networks of teamwork, belonging, shared experience, and camaraderie. The transition from military service can significantly change those relationships and support structures.

Golf naturally creates peer groups. Veterans spending several hours together on a golf course have an opportunity to talk, build friendships, share experiences, exchange resources, and develop relationships outside of a clinical or government-office environment.

The VACCC could intentionally strengthen this aspect of the initiative through Veteran beginner cohorts, instructional groups, league opportunities, Veteran golf days, intergenerational Veteran events, and periodic wellness outings. The objective would not be competition. **The objective would be connection.**

SUPPORTING VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

Accessibility should be incorporated into the initiative from its inception. Many Veterans served by the VACCC live with service-connected disabilities or mobility limitations. The pilot should therefore examine accessible carts, adaptive golf equipment, modified instructional techniques, shorter playing formats, driving-range participation, putting activities, and partnerships with PGA Professionals experienced in adaptive golf.

Participation should not require a Veteran to complete 18 holes. For some participants, wellness may mean playing nine holes. For another Veteran, it may mean attending a one-hour clinic. For another, it may simply mean meeting other Veterans at a driving range and learning to swing a club. A successful program should meet Veterans where they are.

BENEFIT TO COOK COUNTY GOLF FACILITIES

The proposed program would simultaneously support Cook County's investment in public recreational facilities. Forest Preserve Golf currently offers multiple public golf courses and facilities throughout the Cook County area. Establishing a Veteran initiative can introduce a new population of County residents to these recreational resources and encourage long-term utilization beyond the pilot program.

Veterans introduced to golf through the initiative may eventually become regular golfers, purchase range balls, participate in leagues, bring family members to Cook County facilities, attend events, purchase food or merchandise, and remain recreational users of County golf properties. The initiative therefore creates an opportunity to advance two public purposes simultaneously: Veteran wellness and increased utilization of Cook County recreational assets.

FROM VETERAN SERVICES TO VETERAN WELLNESS

Historically, government Veteran programs have understandably concentrated on responding when a Veteran experiences a crisis: housing insecurity, utility disconnection, food insecurity, unemployment, benefit problems, mental-health emergencies, or financial hardship. Those services remain critical. However, a comprehensive Veteran service system must also ask: What can we do before a Veteran reaches crisis?

The Veteran Health & Wellness Golf Initiative represents an opportunity for the VACCC to expand the continuum of Veteran services from crisis response to include prevention, wellness, engagement, recreation, peer connection, and quality of life. A Veteran does not have to be experiencing an emergency to benefit from the VACCC. The Commission should also create opportunities that help Veterans remain healthy, connected, active, and engaged within their communities.

CONNECTION TO OTHER VACCC SERVICES

The initiative can also become another point of entry into the larger VACCC service network. VACCC outreach staff and Veteran Service Officers would periodically participate in golf clinics and Veteran events, allowing Veterans to learn about:

- VA disability compensation;
- pension benefits;
- healthcare eligibility;
- emergency financial assistance;
- employment resources;
- housing resources;
- legal assistance;
- transportation assistance;
- burial benefits;
- mental-health resources; and
- other VACCC programs.

A Cook County Veteran who initially engages with the VACCC because of golf may ultimately discover benefits or services they did not know were available. The program can therefore function as both a wellness initiative and an innovative outreach strategy.

PROPOSED FY27 PILOT FRAMEWORK

Phase I — Program Development

Establish agreements with Troon and participating golf facilities; identify multi strategically located pilot locations; establish eligibility, scheduling, participant registration, reporting, and program safeguards.

Phase II — Introduction to Golf

Provide beginner orientations and PGA Professional instruction for Veterans who have never played or require additional instruction.

Phase III — Equipment Access

Develop donated, loaner, sponsored, or VACCC-supported equipment resources so financial hardship does not prevent participation.

Phase IV — Veteran Golf Access

Launch subsidized or discounted rounds through the participating golf-course network.

Phase V — Community Building

Establish Cook County Veteran beginner groups, clinics, golf days, and other opportunities to encourage continued participation and peer connection.

Phase VI — Evaluation

Measure utilization, geographic reach, repeat participation, participant experience, costs, partner contributions, and demand for continuation or expansion.

PROPOSED PROGRAM OUTCOME MODEL

COUNTY INVESTMENT Affordable access • instruction • equipment	PARTICIPATION Outdoor activity • movement • peer interaction	NEAR-TERM Connection • confidence • service awareness	LONG-TERM GOALS Wellness • sustained recreation • community engagement
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COUNTY INVESTMENT

Golf Access

- PGA Instruction
- Equipment
- County Golf Facilities
- VACCC Outreach
- Private/Philanthropic Partnerships

VETERAN PARTICIPATION

Outdoor Activity

- Physical Movement
- Skill Development
- Peer Interaction
- Routine
- Recreation



NEAR-TERM OUTCOMES

Greater Social Connection

- Increased Physical Activity
- Increased Outdoor Recreation
- Greater Confidence
- Reduced Barriers to Recreation
- Increased Awareness of VACCC Service



LONG-TERM PROGRAM GOALS

Improved Veteran Wellness

- Stronger Veteran Networks
- Continued Recreational Participation
- Increased Use of County Assets
- Greater Engagement with Veteran Services
- Improved Quality of Life

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR COUNTY SUPPORT

The Veteran Health & Wellness Golf Initiative represents an opportunity for Cook County to create a high-visibility Veteran wellness program without developing a new recreational infrastructure from the ground up. The County already possesses golf and recreational assets. Troon brings golf-course management expertise and a willingness to participate in the development of an affordable Veteran-access model. PGA Professionals can bring instructional expertise. The VACCC brings direct access to Cook County's Veteran population, outreach capabilities, Veteran Service Officers, existing partnerships, and an established infrastructure for administering Veteran programs.

COOK COUNTY Existing recreational assets + public mission	VACCC Veteran reach + program administration	TROON Golf operations + access partnership	PGA / SPONSORS Instruction + potential in-kind support
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Together, these resources can create substantially greater public value than any partner could create independently.

FY27: PILOT, MEASURE, AND PROVE

The VACCC recommends that FY27 serve as the proof-of-concept year for the Cook County Veteran Health & Wellness Golf Initiative. Rather than requesting immediate Countywide implementation, the Commission proposes beginning strategically with multi locations, monitoring utilization, evaluating outcomes, documenting partner contributions, surveying participating Veterans, and establishing actual operating costs.

This approach allows the County to make future funding decisions based upon measurable Cook County data rather than projections alone. If the FY27 pilot demonstrates significant Veteran participation, repeat utilization, positive participant outcomes, geographic demand, effective partnerships, and responsible cost management, the VACCC would return in FY28 with evidence supporting continuation of the programming.

XI. OUTREACH

Connecting Veterans. Strengthening Communities. Expanding Access to Earned Benefits.

Program Overview

The Communications and Outreach Division serves as the Commission's primary community engagement, Veteran navigation, and field service delivery function for the VACCC. Its mission is to increase awareness of Commission services, identify Veterans in need, and connect Veterans and their families with the benefits and resources they have earned through military service. For many Veterans, Communications and Outreach provides their first interaction with our Commission. Whether through a community event, VetConnect office hours, Claims Clinic, educational presentation, social media, or referral from a community partner, Outreach serves as the entry point into Commission services.

Unlike traditional outreach programs that focus solely on public awareness, the Communications and Outreach Division is fully integrated into the Commission's service delivery model. Every outreach initiative is designed to connect Veterans with accredited Veteran Service Officers, Emergency Financial Services, healthcare enrollment, and verified community resources.

Why Communications & Outreach Matters

A total of 132,000+ Veterans call Cook County their home, yet many remain unaware of the benefits and services available to them. Some have never filed for the VA benefits they earned. Others are unaware of available healthcare, emergency financial assistance, employment resources, or local programs designed specifically for Veterans and their families. Many Veterans seek assistance only after experiencing financial hardship, housing instability, unemployment, or a health crisis. The Commission believes Veterans should be connected with services before these challenges become dire emergencies.

Through proactive community engagement, recurring VetConnect office hours, Claims Clinics, educational programming, strategic communications, and partnerships with municipalities and community organizations, the Division ensures Veterans know where to turn before a crisis occurs. Every Veteran reached through our Outreach Coordinators represents another opportunity to improve quality of life through earned federal, state, county, and community resources.

Simply stated: Veterans cannot access benefits they do not know exist.

Communications and Outreach ensure they do.

Growing Demand

Demand for Commission services continues to increase throughout Cook County. During FY26, the Veterans Assistance Commission experienced substantial growth in Veteran engagement, accredited claims assistance, community referrals, and partnerships. As awareness of Commission programs increased, so did the demand for recurring VetConnect office hours, Claims Clinics, educational programming, and accredited claims representation.

Despite operating below authorized staffing levels, the Communications and Outreach Division continued expanding community engagement while supporting the Commission's rapidly growing Veteran Service Officer Program. These accomplishments demonstrate both the effectiveness of the current operating model and the increasing demand for Outreach services throughout Cook County.

The Role of Communications & Outreach

The Communications and Outreach Division serves as the Commission's primary community engagement and Veteran navigation program. Rather than functioning solely as a public information office, Outreach Coordinators act as subject matter experts who

provide immediate guidance, resource navigation, and problem resolution for Veterans, their families, caregivers, surviving spouses, community partners, and elected officials.

Every Outreach Coordinator is trained to understand the Commission's programs, VA benefits, healthcare enrollment, emergency financial assistance, and the network of federal, state, county, and community resources available to Veterans. During a single interaction, coordinators assess needs, explain eligibility requirements, identify required documentation, answer questions, and connect individuals directly with the appropriate programs and points of contact.

The goal is for every successful interaction to result in tangible assistance.

This proactive approach streamlines the service delivery process by ensuring Veterans arrive prepared for appointments with the appropriate documentation and a clear understanding of the services available to them. By resolving routine questions, completing initial triage, and facilitating referrals before appointments are scheduled, Outreach Coordinators reduce delays, improve access to benefits, and allow accredited Veteran Service Officers and EFS caseworkers to focus on claims development, legal representation, services and complex case management rather than preliminary intake.

The Division also serves as a trusted resource for municipalities, elected officials, libraries, colleges and universities, healthcare providers, employers, Veteran Service Organizations, nonprofit organizations, and community groups throughout Cook County. Outreach Coordinators regularly assist partner organizations by answering questions, explaining available Veteran resources, providing technical guidance, and helping staff navigate the appropriate referral process for Veterans in their communities. Through years of partnership development, the Division has established an extensive network of contacts and referral pathways, allowing coordinators to connect Veterans with the appropriate

agencies quickly and efficiently instead of requiring them to navigate complex systems on their own.

Communications and Outreach is not simply responsible for increasing public awareness – it is the Commission's primary access point into every major program. Every successful interaction results in tangible assistance, whether connecting a Veteran to an accredited Veteran Service Officer, enrolling them in healthcare, identifying emergency financial assistance, or providing an immediate referral to the appropriate community resource. This integrated service model improves access, reduces barriers to care, strengthens community partnerships, and ensures Veterans receive timely, knowledgeable assistance wherever they encounter the Commission throughout Cook County. Ultimately, by engaging Veterans before a crisis occurs, the Division helps connect individuals with answers during their first interaction with the VACCC, reducing delays in care and preventing small issues from becoming larger emergencies.

FY26 Operational Performance

During the first half of FY26, the Communications and Outreach Division expanded community engagement, strengthened strategic partnerships, and increased access to Commission services throughout Cook County despite operating below its authorized staffing level. By implementing a proactive, field-based service delivery model, the Division increased opportunities for Veterans and their families to receive knowledgeable assistance within their own communities while expanding partnerships with municipalities, elected officials, libraries, colleges and universities, healthcare providers, employers, Veteran Service Organizations, and community organizations.

As demand for Veteran services continued to grow, the Division strategically prioritized initiatives that generated the greatest operational impact, including recurring VetConnect

Performance Measure	FY26 Actual (1 Filled Position)	Current Authorized Capacity (2 FTE)	FY27 Proposed Capacity (4 FTE)
VetConnect Office Hours	111	220	440
Resource & Community Events	67	135	270
Ceremonial & Recognition Events	22	44	88
Total Community Engagement Activities	201	400	800
Veterans Directly Assisted	692	1,400	2,800
Veteran Interactions	2,161	4,300	8,600

office hours, Claims Clinics, direct Veteran engagement, and support for the Veteran Service Officer Program. Outreach Coordinators also served as subject matter experts, providing resource navigation, conducting initial eligibility and documentation reviews, and connecting Veterans with the appropriate Commission programs and community resources. This streamlined the service process, improved appointment readiness, reduced barriers to care, and allowed Veteran Service Officers and Emergency Financial Services staff to focus on claims development, complex case management, and direct service delivery.

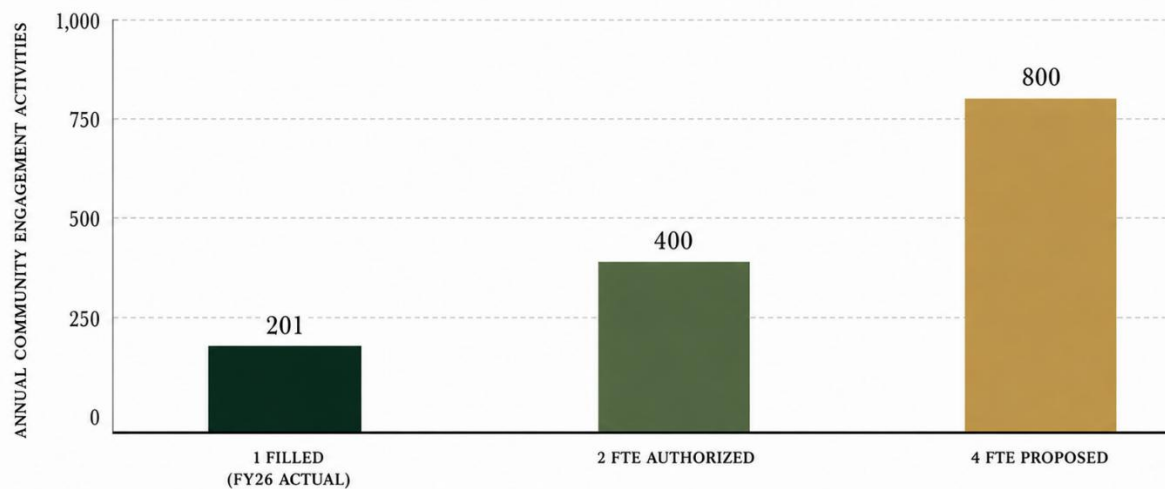
These efforts resulted in measurable growth across every major performance indicator, including community engagement activities, Veterans interacted with, Veterans directly assisted, and strategic partnerships. The results demonstrate that the Division's integrated service model not only increases public awareness but also improves operational efficiency, strengthens collaboration across Cook County, and ensures more Veterans receive timely access to the benefits, services, and resources they have earned.

FY26 Communications & Outreach by the Numbers

Projected operational capacity is based on FY26 performance with one filled Outreach position. Projections assume comparable productivity as staffing increases and represent anticipated annual operating capacity.

Operational Capacity by Staffing Level

Illustrative comparison of annual community engagement activities as staffing increases.



The Division's anticipated operational capacity is approximately 800 community engagement activities annually under the proposed FY27 staffing model.

Operational Highlights

Throughout the first half of FY26, the Communications and Outreach Division continued expanding the Commission's presence throughout Cook County while strengthening relationships with Veterans, municipalities, community organizations, healthcare providers, educational institutions, and Veteran Service Organizations.

Major accomplishments included:

- Conducting 201 community engagement activities throughout Cook County, breaking records for four consecutive months
- Expanding recurring VetConnect office hours by 64 percent between the first and second quarters
- Increasing direct Veteran assistance by 45 percent, more than doubling Veteran interactions during the second quarter

Through these initiatives, the program increased referrals to accredited Veteran Service Officers, Emergency Financial Services, and other Commission programs, ensuring Veterans and their families were connected to the resources they had earned. The program also advanced countywide public awareness by supporting partner organizations and community events through digital communications, educational materials, outreach campaigns, and direct community engagement.

What These Projections Demonstrate

During FY26, the Communications and Outreach Division produced measurable growth while operating with only one filled position. If the Division were staffed to its currently authorized level of two positions, the Commission would expect approximately double the current operational capacity, allowing for increased community engagement, additional VetConnect office hours, expanded Claims Clinics, and more direct Veteran assistance.

Approval of the FY27 staffing request would further increase authorized staffing to four positions, allowing the Commission to approximately double that capacity again. This expansion would significantly increase countywide coverage, strengthen partnerships, restore educational programming, and connect substantially more Veterans with accredited claims assistance and Commission services. The projected increase in activity represents more than additional events. It represents more Veterans learning about available benefits, more claims initiated, more referrals to Commission programs, stronger partnerships, and greater access to earned federal, state, county, and community resources.

Why These Results Matter

The measurable growth achieved during the first half of FY26 demonstrates the effectiveness of the Commission's community engagement strategy. As awareness of Commission services increased, so did Veteran participation, community partnerships, and access to accredited benefits assistance. These results were achieved while operating below

authorized staffing levels and while supporting a rapidly expanding Veteran Service Officer Program.

The continued growth in every major performance category demonstrates that demand for Outreach services extends beyond the Division's current operational capacity. The following sections outline the Commission's proposed FY27 staffing expansion and demonstrates how additional personnel will allow the Communications and Outreach Division to significantly expand community engagement, improve access to services, and connect even more Veterans with the benefits they have earned.

FY27 Staffing Request and Operational Capacity – Investing in Countywide Access

The Communications and Outreach Division has demonstrated measurable growth in community engagement, Veteran participation, and public awareness despite operating below its authorized staffing level. As demand for Commission services continues to increase, additional staffing is necessary to sustain current operations while expanding access to Veterans throughout Cook County. The FY27 budget request strengthens the Division's ability to deliver consistent, high-quality outreach while increasing the Commission's presence in communities across the County. This investment will improve operational efficiency, expand recurring service locations, strengthen strategic partnerships, and ensure more Veterans are connected with the benefits and services they have earned.

Current Staffing

In FY26, the Communications and Outreach Division was authorized **for three full-time positions (FTE: 3.0)**.

At present:

- Two positions are filled. (Manager, Communications and Outreach & Communications and Outreach Coordinator)
- One authorized position was reclassified. (Manager, Communications and Outreach)

The FY27 budget requests two additional full-time positions (Communications and Outreach Coordinators), increasing the Division's authorized staffing from 3.0 FTE to 4.0 FTE's.

Communications & Outreach Division	Current Authorized	Currently Filled	FY27 Proposed	Net Increase
Full-Time Employees (FTE)	2	1	4	+2

Why Additional Staffing Is Needed

As demand for services increased throughout FY26, available personnel shifted resources toward recurring VetConnect office hours, Claims Clinics, direct Veteran engagement, and support for accredited Veteran Service Officers. This approach ensured Veterans continued receiving timely access to benefits counseling, claims assistance, and essential support services, but required the Division to postpone or reduce several outreach initiatives, including portions of the VetTalk educational speaker series, expanded community programming, and the development of new countywide outreach efforts.

While this strategy allowed the Commission to prioritize direct service delivery, the current staffing model has reached its practical operational capacity. Outreach initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and strengthened partnerships with municipalities, healthcare providers, educational institutions, employers, Veteran Service Organizations, and community organizations have significantly increased public awareness of the Commission and resulted in a substantial increase in Veterans seeking assistance. As the Commission continues expanding its presence throughout Cook County, demand for services has grown proportionally, placing increasing strain on existing personnel.

Cook County is home to approximately 141,000 Veterans, not including eligible dependents, surviving spouses seeking Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC),

caregivers, or Veterans from neighboring counties who wish to access the Commission's VSO services due to the agency's proximity and reputation. Meeting the needs of this population requires more than maintaining current service levels—it requires sufficient staffing to sustain outreach, respond to increased referrals, and provide timely, individualized assistance without reducing existing programs.

Maintaining the current staffing model limits the Commission's ability to expand services despite continued growth in demand. Although every organization ultimately reaches a point where staffing levels align with operational requirements, the Outreach Division has not yet reached that equilibrium. Current demand continues to outpace available personnel, requiring staff to continually balance direct service delivery against community engagement activities and administrative duties.

Additional staffing will remove this operational constraint, allow the Division to fully implement its countywide outreach strategy, expand recurring Claims Clinics and VetConnect office hours, strengthen partnerships across Cook County, and ensure the Commission can continue providing responsive, high-quality services to the growing number of Veterans and families seeking assistance.

Operational Capacity with Proposed Staffing – What this Increase will Deliver

Approval of the FY27 staffing request will significantly expand the Division's operational capacity while improving service delivery throughout Cook County.

Additional staffing will allow the Division to:

- Expand Countywide Access
- Increase access to accredited Veteran services through recurring VetConnect office hours and Claims Clinics throughout Cook County
- Establish new service locations in underserved communities
- Improve access for Veterans facing transportation, mobility, or scheduling barriers
- Build consistent relationships across all regions of Cook County rather than focusing only on high-volume areas

Increase Veteran Services

- Serve more Veterans, dependents, caregivers, and surviving spouses
- Increase referrals to our Veteran Service Officers, Emergency Financial Services, and our trusted partner programs
- Expand participation in community events, resource fairs, and outreach activities

Strengthen Community Partnerships

- Expand partnerships with municipalities, healthcare providers, colleges, Veteran Service Organizations, and nonprofits
- Provide greater support to elected officials and community partners serving local Veterans
- Improve coordination and referrals between partner organizations and the Commission

Restore Educational Programming

- Restore and expand the VetTalk educational speaker series
- Increase presentations on VA benefits, healthcare, employment, caregiver resources, and Commission services
- Expand multilingual educational materials

Improve Public Communications

- Strengthen website management and digital communications
- Increase public awareness campaigns and social media engagement
- Provide partners with additional educational and outreach materials, both physical and digital

Increase Operational Capacity

- Reduce staff workload and prevent burnout
- Allow Outreach staff to focus on community engagement instead of balancing competing operational demands and administrative duties
- Increase flexibility to respond to growing demand and new partnership opportunities

Preparing for the Future

Communications and Outreach is no longer an emerging program – it has become an essential component of the Commission's service delivery model. The measurable growth achieved during FY26 demonstrates that strategic community engagement directly increases Veteran participation, strengthens partnerships, expands access to accredited

services, and improves organizational efficiency. The proposed staffing expansion is intended to sustain that momentum and ensure the Commission can continue meeting the needs of Cook County's growing Veteran population.

The Outreach Division has demonstrated that its service delivery model is effective. Through strategic partnerships, targeted public awareness campaigns, and expanded community engagement, the Division has grown to average approximately 35 to 40 outreach events each month while steadily increasing both the number of Veterans engaged and those directly connected with Commission services. These accomplishments have been achieved while balancing administrative responsibilities, organizational initiatives, and direct support to Veterans and partner agencies.

However, the Division has reached a point where continued growth can no longer be sustained through operational efficiencies alone. While staff will continue identifying ways to improve processes and maximize available resources, additional personnel are now necessary to meet the increasing demand for services. Future growth depends on expanding the Commission's ability to maintain a visible presence throughout Cook County, strengthen relationships with local governments and community partners, and provide direct engagement with Veterans where they live, work, and receive services.

Investing in additional Outreach personnel is an investment in the Commission's long-term ability to connect Veterans with the benefits they have earned. It will allow the Commission to expand its coverage countywide, increase access to accredited Veteran services, reduce operational strain on existing staff, and preserve the high level of service Veterans have come to expect. Most importantly, it will ensure the Commission can continue building trusted community partnerships and connecting more Veterans and their families with the benefits, resources, and support they have earned – both today and as demand continues to grow in the years ahead.

XII. FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

A \$5.66 million proposal is being requested to meet rising needs, expand direct assistance, increase organizational capacity, and strengthen regional access.

FY2027 PROPOSED \$5.665M Total operating budget	YEAR-OVER-YEAR +\$2.465M 77.0% increase	DIRECT ASSISTANCE \$2.0M 100% program increase
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Budget Rationale

The VACCC proposes an FY27 operating budget of \$5,664,819.13, an increase of \$2,464,819.13, or approximately 77.0%, over the FY26 adopted budget of \$3.2 million. The request responds to sustained growth in demand for emergency financial assistance while building the staffing, professional support, and regional infrastructure required to provide timely, consistent, and accessible services throughout Cook County. Of the total increase, \$2 million is dedicated to Special Cooperative Programs, doubling direct-assistance capacity from \$1.0 million to \$2.0 million. The remaining balance will support vacant-position hiring, expanded contractual and professional services, and the establishment and operation of the Rolling Meadows office, including technology, equipment, furnishings, utilities, supplies, and other facility needs.

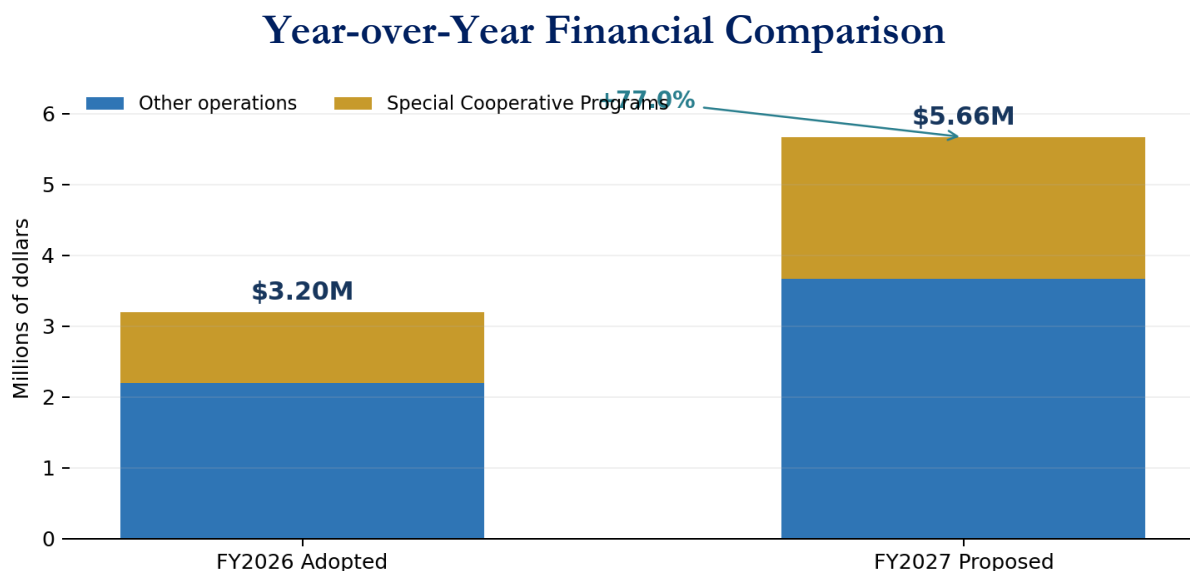


Figure 1. FY26 adopted and FY27 proposed funding. "Other operations" is calculated as total budget less Special Cooperative Programs.

Financial Highlights

Financial measure	FY2026	FY2027	Dollar change	Percent change
Total operating budget	\$3,200,000	\$5,664,819.13	+\$2,464,819.13	+77.0%
Special Cooperative Programs	\$1,000,000	\$2,000,000	+\$1,000,000	+100.0%
Other operations*	\$2,200,000	\$3,664,819.13	+\$1,464,819.13	+66.6%

**Calculated as total operating budget less Special Cooperative Programs; the detailed allocation remains subject to final appropriation and line-item approval.*

What the Investment Makes Possible

- **Substantially greater emergency-assistance capacity.** The \$1.0 million Special Cooperative Programs increase doubles the appropriation available to respond to housing, utility, food, transportation, and other urgent financial hardships.
- **More timely service delivery.** Filling authorized vacancies improves intake, case processing, claims advocacy, financial administration, outreach coverage, and continuity of service.
- **Regional access in northwest and south suburban Cook County.** The Rolling Meadows office reduces geographic barriers and brings VACCC services closer to Veterans who may face transportation, mobility, work-schedule, or technology challenges. Additionally, work will begin to open a location in the southland of suburban Cook County.
- **Reliable operational support.** Contractual services, technology, equipment, furnishings, utilities, and supplies provide the foundation needed for safe, professional, and consistent service at all locations.
- **Stronger organizational resilience.** Additional capacity helps the Commission absorb increases in demand, maintain appropriate internal controls, and reduce overreliance on a limited number of staff members.

To connect the requested investment to measurable results, VACCC can report the following indicators during FY2027:

Measure	What it demonstrates
Direct assistance utilization	Dollars distributed, households assisted, assistance categories, and geographic reach.
Service timeliness	Average time from complete application to determination or assistance issuance. (Initiated with digitization process)
Workforce progress	Vacancies filled, onboarding completed, and service capacity added by function.
Rolling Meadows activity	Veterans served, appointments, walk-ins, referrals, outreach contacts, and service types delivered.
Claims advocacy impact	Claims filed or supported, decisions received, and federal benefits secured when verified and reportable.
Budget stewardship	Budget-to-actual performance, major variances, and corrective actions or reallocations.

FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

The FY27 proposal balances immediate relief with durable service capacity. Direct assistance addresses urgent household needs today, while investments in personnel, professional support, the Rolling Meadows office expansion, the southland implementation and the Commission's ability to serve Veterans consistently across Cook County. Together, these investments position the VACCC to respond to rising demand, document the public value of the appropriation, and maintain responsible stewardship of County resources.

PROPOSED FY27 BUDGET REQUEST BREAKDOWN

LINE ITEM	REQUEST	COMMENTS
Sal/Wag of Reg Employees		FY26 FTE: 20 + FY27 FTE REQUEST: 15
Turnover Adjustment		
All Employee Insurance & Fringe Benefits		
Prof/Tech Membership Fees &		NACVSO Membership Dues, Annual Org NACVSO Dues, IACVAC Annual ORG Membership, Website Annual Fee, Superintendent/Deputy Superintendent Professional Memberships, Vetraspec/Tyler Tech (Annual Subscription + Annual Report Builder), Other Membership Fees
Training Program - Staff		IACVAC Annual Training CEU & Banquet (x17 + each for banquet), NACVSO Basic Basic Benefits (8 New VSO's), NACVSO Annual Training CEU (x6 FY26 VSO's), NACVSO Annual Conference (x11 each), Admin Professional Training (x4), Finance Professional Training (x2), Communications & Outreach Pro Training (x4), Tobenna Speaks All Staff Training, American AED All Staff Training, Other Training
Professional Develop/Fees		
Transportation and Travel Expenses		Ford Bronco Fuel & Maint, Ford Maverick Fuel & Maint, Transit Passenger Van Fuel & Maint, NACVSO Conference North Carolina 7/11-7/18/2027 (Hotel + Flight + Per Diem), IACO Conference Springfield, IL. 4/7-9/2027 (Hotel + Per diem x17), IACVAC Conference East Peoria, IL. TBD (Hotel + Per diem x17), Other Travel
PERSONNEL SERVICES	\$3,138,425.00	
Communications Services		COOK COUNTY INPUT: Total: AT&T Sentinel Verizon Apple I-Phones:x28 Staff CC Cell Phone Monthly Charges, CC Tech Equip:HP Laptops, Additional Employees added
Postage		Multiple Mailers throughout the year
External Graphics and Reproduction Services		External Graphics/ Marketing Materials and Reproduction for 3 separate VAC's (69 W, 1100 S, Rolling Meadows), Staff Reproduction/Marketing, (CTA/PACE Marketing)
Professional Services		Annual Tax & Audit Fees, Quench (x2 locations - 1100 S & Rolling Meadows), Veteran Event Catering (Min.1 event each month, no change from FY26), Digitization Service w/ Iron Mountain, 50 Final Payment for Veteran Memorial Statue, Other consultants and vendors
Legal Services		Legal Fees Recommendations
Special or Coop Programs		Annual Tax & Audit Fees, Quench (x2 locations - 1100 S & Rolling Meadows), Veteran Event Catering (Min.1 event each month, no change from FY26), Digitization Service w/ Iron Mountain, 50Final Payment for Veteran Memorial Statue, Other consultants and vendors
CONTRACTUAL SERVICES	\$2,496,393.00	
Office Supplies	\$30,000.00	Office Supply Requested for total of 3 separate locations -69 W., -1100 S. and Rolling Meadows)
TOTAL REQUEST	\$5,664,818.00	

NOTE: The proposed FY27 budget request above is based on estimated costs for which the VACCC may be directly responsible. The overall request may decrease once Cook County confirms which expenses it will support, including certain Transportation and Travel Expenses, Communication Services, vehicle maintenance, and electronic equipment through alternate county funding avenues. Any County-supported costs will be removed or adjusted to reflect the final actual VACCC responsibility.

XIII. CLOSING STATEMENT

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County enters Fiscal Year 2027 at a defining point in its growth. The initiatives presented throughout this Budget Proposal are not simply requests for additional resources; they represent the next phase in building a comprehensive, accessible, accountable, and sustainable system of Veteran services capable of meeting the needs of Veterans and their families throughout Cook County.

Over the past several fiscal years, the VACCC has demonstrated what can be accomplished when meaningful public investment is paired with responsible leadership, strategic partnerships, and a dedicated commitment to service. Awareness of the Commission has increased, so too has the demand for emergency financial assistance, accredited Veteran Service Officer representation, outreach, advocacy, transportation, and comprehensive support services.

Cook County is home to approximately 132,000+ Veterans and represents approximately one-fifth of Illinois' Veteran population. The size, geographic diversity, and complexity of this population require a Veteran service delivery system capable of reaching individuals where they live, work, receive healthcare, attend school, and participate in their communities.

This FY27 Budget Proposal responds directly to that responsibility.

Investing in Capacity

The proposed FY27 organizational structure preserves the twenty positions authorized in FY26 while adding fifteen strategically aligned positions, including a Bureau Chief of Veteran Services and eight additional Veteran Service Officers. This expansion is designed to increase direct-service capacity, strengthen leadership and accountability, improve regional coverage, and significantly expand the Commission's ability to connect Veterans and their families with the federal benefits they have earned through their military service.

This investment is particularly significant because the VACCC has already demonstrated the financial impact of accredited Veteran representation. During the first half of FY26, the VSO Program generated approximately **\$947,867 in retroactive VA benefits and more than \$12.44 million in recurring annual VA compensation for Veterans and their families.**

Under the proposed FY27 staffing model, the Commission projects the operational capacity to provide accredited representation to approximately **13,000 Veterans annually, complete approximately 24,808 claim actions, and facilitate approximately \$127.96 million in recurring annual VA compensation.**

These federal dollars do more than improve the lives of individual Veterans. They support household stability, housing, healthcare, education, transportation, consumer spending, and economic activity throughout Cook County.

Every successful Veteran claim therefore represents two victories: an earned benefit delivered to a Veteran or family and new federal resources brought into Cook County.

Expanding Access Across Cook County

FY27 also represents the continued transition of the VACCC from a primarily centralized operation into a regional, countywide service delivery system.

Investments in staffing, regional offices, Communications and Outreach, VetConnect Office Hours, Claims Clinics, transportation resources, and the Commission's vehicle fleet will allow services to move closer to the Veterans who need them.

This approach is particularly important for Veterans who face transportation challenges, mobility limitations, financial hardship, geographic barriers, or difficulty navigating traditional systems of Veteran assistance.

The Commission's outreach strategy reinforces a fundamental principle reflected throughout this proposal:

Veterans cannot access benefits they do not know exist.

Through stronger community partnerships, recurring outreach locations, accredited representation, and increased visibility throughout Cook County, the VACCC intends to identify Veterans earlier, connect them with resources sooner, and, whenever possible, intervene before financial or personal challenges become crises.

Building for the Future

Several FY27 initiatives have also been intentionally designed as measurable investments that can inform future County decisions. The implementation of the VACCC vehicle fleet will provide documented information regarding utilization, geographic coverage, Veteran transportation needs, operating costs, staff efficiency, and unmet demand. Those results will provide an evidence-based foundation for determining whether additional fleet investments are warranted in FY28.

Similarly, innovative initiatives such as the Veteran Health & Wellness Golf Program are structured as proof-of-concept opportunities in which participation, outcomes, partnerships, costs, and Veteran feedback can be evaluated before broader expansion is considered. This approach reflects our commitment to responsible growth: pilot strategically, measure performance, demonstrate outcomes, and expand when the evidence supports doing so.

A Partnership with Cook County

The accomplishments outlined throughout this proposal have not occurred independently. They have been made possible through collaboration among the VACCC Executive Board and membership, Cook County leadership, County departments, Veteran Service Organizations, federal and state agencies, municipalities, healthcare systems, educational institutions, community organizations, and countless individuals who share a commitment to serving those who served our Nation.

The VACCC recognizes that every public dollar entrusted to the Commission carries an obligation to demonstrate responsible stewardship, measurable outcomes, transparency, and meaningful service to the Veteran community.

For that reason, the FY27 Budget Proposal should not be viewed solely through the lens of expenditure. It should be evaluated through the outcomes those expenditures are positioned to produce:

- More Veterans served.
- More earned benefits secured.
- More federal dollars returned to Cook County.
- Greater access to services throughout the County.

- Earlier intervention before Veterans reach crisis.
- Stronger Veteran households and communities.
- And a Veteran service infrastructure capable of meeting Cook County's needs for years to come.

The VACCC has demonstrated that investment in Veteran services produces measurable results. FY27 provides an opportunity to build upon that foundation and transform the Commission's growing programs into a fully integrated, regional, and sustainable system of Veteran support.

A well-supported Veterans Assistance Commission is therefore more than a line item in the Cook County budget. It is an investment in Veterans, families, communities, and the economic strength of Cook County itself. As demonstrated throughout this proposal, successful Veteran advocacy can bring substantial federally funded resources into the County while simultaneously reducing barriers to healthcare, housing stability, financial security, and other essential supports.

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County respectfully requests Cook County's continued partnership and investment in the FY27 initiatives presented in this proposal.

Together, we have the opportunity not simply to respond to the needs of today's Veterans, but to build the infrastructure necessary to serve tomorrow's Veterans as well.

Our commitment remains simple:

To ensure that every eligible Cook County Veteran and their family knows where to turn, has access to the benefits and services they have earned, and receives the dignity, advocacy, and support worthy of their service to our Nation.

On behalf of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County, our Executive Board, membership organizations, staff, and, most importantly, the Veterans and families we are privileged to serve, thank you for your continued partnership, consideration, and commitment to Cook County's Veteran community.

