

VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION OF COOK COUNTY

Meeting Minutes
16 December 2025 @1900hr
AMVETS Post 192
7731 S Harlem Ave. Bridgeview, IL

Executive Board Members: Frank Gutierrez (*President*), William Browne (*1st Vice President*), Dutch DeGroot (*2nd Vice President*), Robert Arciola (*Treasurer*)
At Large Board Members: Greg Jacobs, Jesus Segura, Evamarie Duff
Appointees: Jim Parker (*Secretary*), Peter Hirt (*Judge Advocate*), Randall Tyner (*Sergeant at Arms*)
Superintendent: Elizabeth D. Soto

I. Call to Order — President Gutierrez

- a. Call to order at 1910hrs.
- b. Roll Call/Quorum — 2nd VP DeGroot announced a quorum is attending per the sign in sheet. A copy of the Attendance Sign In Sheet is attached to and a part of these Minutes.
- c. Recognition of Guests - President Gutierrez
 - Tiffany Perry from Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs
 - Maria Gallo, Chief of Staff for Cook County Commissioner Maggie Trevor
 - Eric Armstrong, Director of Cook County Veterans Affairs
 - Tommy Hansen, Congressional candidate for Illinois 5th District

II. Opening Reflection — Art Ellingsen for Chaplain Kevin Ake

- a. Prayer/Reflection.
- b. Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Consent Agenda — President Gutierrez.

- a. Approval of Minutes of 23 September 2025 Membership Meeting. The Minutes were not read but were distributed to all members in advance of the meeting. A motion to approve the Minutes, was made by Art Ellingsen and seconded by Evamarie Duff. The motion was passed by unanimous voice vote.

IV. Public Comment.

- a. Jim Schultz US Army Chaplin Major Edward Vattman historical monument in disrepair at Fort Sheridan National Cemetery. It has been a very frustrating campaigner to get this repaired. Pete Hirt asked if the VA didn't have a preservation committee. Schultz replied that they do but have been unresponsive.

V. Governance Report — Treasurer Robert Arciola

- a. Treasurer Robert Arceola reported a current balance of \$5,118.07 for the 501(c)(3) organization, with deposits of \$89.50 made at the end of September. No other transactions occurred during the reporting period.

A motion to approve the report, was made by Jim Schultz and seconded by Bill Starr. The motion was passed by unanimous voice vote.

VI. VACCC Office Reports — Superintendent Elizabeth Soto

a. Veterans Assistance Commission Operations Report. Superintendent Soto

- Fourth Quarter Financial Performance Record Achievement: October 2024 marked a historic milestone with **\$111,759.28** in direct financial assistance provided - the highest monthly amount in VACCC history
- Total Q4 Assistance: **\$332,267.87** distributed to support 991 veterans, including 181 new veterans to the VACCC
- Annual Total: **\$849,822.95** in direct assistance provided to **3,428** Cook County veterans in FY 25
- Growth: 50% increase in overall assistance compared to Q3, with significant growth in rental, food, and personal hygiene aid

b. Staffing and Budget Updates. Superintendent Soto

- FY 26 Budget^{**}: \$3.2 million total budget with approximately \$1 million dedicated to direct veteran services

- Staffing: Approved for 20 full-time employees (increased from 15 in FY 25)

•Office Locations:

- Hamilton Headquarters: 1100 South Hamilton (lower level)
- Chicago Regional Office: 69 West Washington, Suite 1420
- Future Rolling Meadows location under renovation

c. Veteran Services Program Derek C. Giffin Manager, Veteran Services

•Fourth Quarter Performance

- Powers of Attorney^{**}: 290 designations
- Intent to File^{**}: 196 submissions
- New Compensation Claims: 121 filed
- Appeals and Reviews: 95 filings

VA System Improvements

- Backlog Reduction: VA reduced veterans benefits backlog by 57%
- Processing Records: VA processed 3.01 million disability compensation and pension claims in FY 25
- AI Implementation: New artificial intelligence procedures significantly reduced claim processing times

- New Staff Addition Ferris Corroboration joined as the newest VSO, bringing 10 years of experience as a Rating Veterans Service Representative at the Chicago VA Regional Office and military service as a US Army tank crew member and aviation operations specialist.

d. Outreach and Communications Conner Intress Communications & Outreach Manager

•Fourth Quarter Achievements

- Events: **67** total events (breaking previous records)
- Veteran Interactions: Over **1,000** veterans engaged
- Technology Integration: 482 unique veterans used the automated intake system, requesting **2,145** individual services

•Digital Innovation

- QR Code Tracking^{**}: Implemented location-based tracking showing 482 intake scans, 327 website visits, and 128 Facebook page visits
- Automated System^{**}: New streamlined process provides immediate email responses with resources and partner connections
- Resource Guide: Updated comprehensive resource book available in digital flip-book format

• Commission Request System

New QR code-based request system implemented for board and commission members to submit questions and suggestions, improving transparency and response tracking.

A motion to approve the report, was made by Jim Schultz and seconded by Evamarie Duff. Discussion commenced on several topics relating to this agenda item (Please refer to the full video on our website vaccookcounty.org). Further questions that time did not allow for are encouraged to be sent via QR code to our staff.

The motion was passed by unanimous voice vote.

VII. Bylaws — Chairman Arciola presented proposed bylaw amendments, including revisions to Article V, Section 5.6, related to attendance and membership suspension. Following discussion, the proposed amendments were tabled to allow for revisions and legal review, with final action deferred to a future membership meeting.

VIII. Budget — 1st VP Brown. No report.

IX. Services Provided — No report George Gandara and Chevonne Woodward.

X. Unfinished Business — President Gutierrez

a. Report on the Membership Corporation. Tabled.

XI. New Business — President Gutierrez

a. Proposal for Announcing Candidates for VACCC Board – 2026

The membership discussed an optional process allowing board candidates to submit biographies in advance of the March election meeting. No formal action was taken.

b. Staff Deployment Policy The Board recommendation directing VAC staff to prioritize outreach and service delivery at locations serving the greatest number of veterans was presented.

A motion was made 2nd VP DeGroot, seconded by Jim Schultz, and approved by voice vote, adopting the policy.

XII. Good of the Order — President Gutierrez.

a. Art Ellingsen introduced Tommy Hansen and also talked about volunteering to be an election judge.

b. Tommy Hansen spoke briefly on his candidacy and military service of his family.

XIII. Future Meeting Sites Update — 2nd VP DeGroot wished everyone a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah. Thanked all the members that attended and stressed the importance of being an active member.

The date will be 24 March 2026 @ 1900 hr. at a location TBA.

XIV. Comments from Special Guest as some wished to speak and missed Public Comment they were allowed to comment.

a. George Gandara on some of his homeless veteran initiatives and outreach.

b. Evamarie Duff on military sexual trauma initiatives by the VACCC and Justyna Berry elaborated on the program.

c. Cook County Department of Veterans Affairs (CCVA) director Eric Armstrong. Talked about their event at Brookfield Zoo this fall.

XV. Adjournment — President Gutierrez

President Gutierrez closed with a thank you to the Board, Members and guests for their contributions to a very productive meeting. Upon a proper Motion by Bill Starr, duly seconded by Evamarie Duff, the meeting was adjourned at 2049 hrs. by unanimous voice vote.

Submitted by Dutch DeGroot for **Jim Parker**, Secretary



VACCC MEMBERSHIP SIGN IN SHEET

Sheet 1 of 2

16 DECEMBER 2025 MEETING

| Organization | X | Delegate | X | Alternate Delegate |
|----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|----------------------|
| American Legion 36 | | Patrick Flannigan | | Gregory Jacobs |
| American Legion 87 | | Willie Mack | | Ashley Shine |
| American Legion 104 | X | Dennis Chavez | X | Michael F Tuman |
| American Legion 183 | X | Ray Toczek | | Timothy Bodkin |
| American Legion 208 | X | Greg Padovani | X | Walter Parus |
| American Legion 216 | | Kevin Ake | | |
| American Legion 335 | | Lorenzo Fiorentino | | Chuy Segura |
| American Legion 478 | | Beverly Fitch | | Nickola Rogers |
| American Legion 525 | X | William "Bill" Starr | X | Laura Matuszak |
| American Legion 615 | X | Ken McClory | X | John Kaminecki |
| American Legion 687 | X | Eugene Weaver | | Alejandro Segoviano |
| American Legion 758 | | Beau D. Butts | X | Frank Gutierrez |
| American Legion 806 | | Al Pizarro | X | Pete Hirt |
| American Legion 829 | X | Chevonne Woodward | | Ray Doeksen |
| American Legion 888 | | Anthony Muro | | Andy Anderson |
| American Legion 923 | X | Clemente E. Rodriguez | X | John Kerrigan |
| American Legion 943 | | John Steciw | | Adam Bihun |
| American Legion 973 | | Eden Puente | | |
| American Legion 974 | X | Anthony Siciliano | X | Thomas Zito |
| American Legion 1052 | | Megan Everett | | Brian Phenegar |
| American Legion 1941 | | Robert Stoltz | X | Edward Krzeminski |
| American Legion 1932 | | Charles Salley | X | James McGee Jr. |
| American Legion 1983 | X | Frank Kelly | X | Antony (Tony) Thomas |
| American Legion 1987 | | Charles Henderson | | Ron Bellamy |
| AMVETS 66 | X | James Schultz | | James (Jim) Parker |
| AMVETS 268 | X | Eddie Brown Jr. | X | Richard Nielson |
| | | | | |



VACCC MEMBERSHIP SIGN IN SHEET

Sheet 2 of 2

16 DECEMBER 2025 MEETING

| Organization | X | Delegate | X | Alternate Delegate |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| DAV Chapter 33 | X | Todd Moore | | Joseph J. Donovan |
| DAV Chapter 84 | X | Kenneth Boor | | William Byers |
| Jewish War Veterans 710 | | Dr. Jerry Field | X | Dennis Kane |
| Marine Corps L 553 | X | Randall L. Tyner | | Paul Zogg |
| Marine Corps L 1408 | X | George Gandara | | Alejandro Morales |
| Mil Order WW | | Zhi Cheng Chen | | |
| MOAA | X | Matthew Garrison | | Roman Golash |
| Navy League 69 | | Leo Alicea | | |
| PVA Vaughan | X | Robert Arciola | | Robert Statam |
| Polish Legion 72 | | David Piecuch | | |
| VFW Post 311 | X | Bill Browne | | Aretha Spurlock |
| VFW Post 981 | X | Stewart Abbink | | Larry Blieski |
| VFW Post 1337 | X | John "Dutch" DeGroot | | Wally Beckman |
| VFW Post 2202 | | John Healy | | Joseph Wein |
| VFW Post 2868 | X | Eric Morales | X | Evamarie Duff |
| VFW Post 2978 | | Ray Doeksen | | Scott Frit |
| VFW Post 3579 | | Keith Renner | X | Ramon Prieto |
| VFW Post 5079 | | Tom Hoskinson | | Antonio Munoz IV |
| VFW Post 5151 | | Phil "Chappy" Ferrer | | |
| VFW Post 5979 | | Richard Wojewnik | X | David Ruiz |
| VFW Post 7186 | X | Thomas J. "Jim" Hughes | | Elliott Jones |
| VFW Post 8322 | X | Paul J. Bezazian | | Paul Knudtson |
| VFW Post 9284 | X | Arthur J. Ellingsen | | Wallace Campbell |
| VFW Post 10778 | | Chuck Bosko | | |
| VVA 242 | X | Kevin Calkins | | John Andres |
| SFA 37 | | Mitchell Janik | | Patrick Crimmins |
| 33 of 51 organizations | | 25 Delegates 16 alternates 41 total | | |



VACCC FY2025
4th Quarter Report

December 16, 2025
Superintendent Elizabeth D. Soto

MISSION

“...for the just, necessary, and needed assistance and services of military Veterans, who served in the Armed Forces of the United States...”

Veterans and Service Members (330 ILCS 45/) Military Veterans Assistance Act

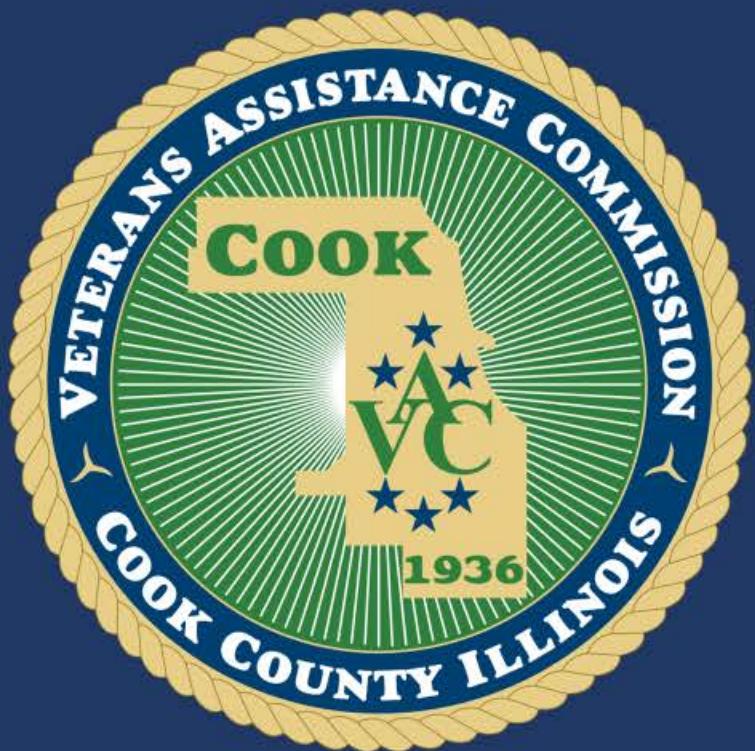
Q4 FINANCIAL REPORT

FY26 ORG CHART & BUDGET

VSO REPORT

OUTREACH REPORT





Q4 Financial Report

PERSONNEL SERVICES

| PERSONNEL SERVICES | SEPTEMBER 2025 | OCTOBER 2025 | NOVEMBER 2025 | 4TH QTR FY 2025 ACTUAL |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 501010-Sal-Wag of Reg Employees | \$ 76,217.05 | \$ 78,622.37 | \$ 81,252.79 | \$ 236,092.21 |
| 501030-Salary/Turnover Adjustment | | | | \$ - |
| 501511-Mandatory Medicare Cost | \$ 1,074.75 | \$ 1,108.07 | \$ 1,146.26 | \$ 3,329.08 |
| 501590-Group Life Insurance | \$ 31.41 | \$ 31.41 | \$ 31.41 | \$ 94.23 |
| 501610-Group Health Insurance | \$ 1,320.31 | \$ 1,320.31 | \$ 1,320.31 | \$ 3,960.93 |
| 501640-Group Dental Insurance | \$ 111.74 | \$ 111.74 | \$ 111.74 | \$ 335.22 |
| 501660-Unemployment Compensation | \$ 10.50 | \$ 10.50 | \$ 10.50 | \$ 31.50 |
| 501690-Vision Care | \$ 19.51 | \$ 19.51 | \$ 19.51 | \$ 58.53 |
| 501715-Group Pharmacy Insurance | \$ 565.78 | \$ 565.78 | \$ 565.78 | \$ 1,697.34 |
| SUBTOTAL: PERSONNEL SERVICES | \$ 79,351.05 | \$ 81,789.69 | \$ 84,458.30 | \$ 245,599.04 |

Note: The Personnel and Operations expenditures are subject to change as month-end entries may not be posted/processed at the time of the data run.

OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE

| OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE | SEPTEMBER 2025 | OCTOBER 2025 | NOVEMBER 2025 | 4TH QTR FY 2025 ACTUAL |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| 501790-Prof /Tech Membership Fees | | \$ 50.00 | | \$ 50.00 |
| 501805-Training Program Staff | \$ 15,200.00 | \$ 400.00 | | \$ 15,600.00 |
| 501836-Transportation and Travel Expenses | \$ 341.15 | \$ 634.36 | \$ 139.80 | \$ 1,115.31 |
| 520150-Communication Services | | | | \$ - |
| 520260-Postage | | \$ 312.00 | | \$ 312.00 |
| 520490-External Graphics and Reproduction Services | \$ 157.50 | | | \$ 157.50 |
| 520830-Professional Services | \$ 63,685.55 | \$ 62,439.40 | \$ 1,293.75 | \$ 127,418.70 |
| 521054-Legal Services | | \$ 2,077.20 | \$ 930.00 | \$ 3,007.20 |
| 530605-Office Supplies | \$ 2,237.65 | \$ 2,784.00 | \$ 3,589.15 | \$ 8,610.80 |
| 540130-Maintenance and Subscription Services | | | | \$ - |
| Bank Fees - Amalgamated Bank | \$ 102.58 | \$ 102.06 | \$ 165.18 | \$ 369.82 |
| Other | \$ 312.46 | | | |
| SUBTOTAL: OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE | \$ 82,036.89 | \$ 68,799.02 | \$ 6,117.88 | \$ 156,641.33 |
| TOTAL | \$ 259,988.79 | \$ 262,347.99 | \$ 212,483.92 | \$ 734,820.70 |

Note: The Personnel and Operations expenditures are subject to change as month-end entries may not be posted/processed at the time of the data run.

DIRECT DISBURSEMENTS

| SPECIAL PROGRAMS | SEPTEMBER 2025 | OCTOBER 2025 | NOVEMBER 2025 | 4TH QTR FY 2025 ACTUAL |
|--|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| 521313 - Special or Coop Programs (Veteran Disbursements) - Reimbursement | \$ 98,600.85 | \$ 111,759.28 | \$ 74,907.74 | \$ 285,267.87 |
| 521313 - Special or Coop Programs (Paid through AP) - Not Reimbursed | | | \$ 47,000.00 | \$ 47,000.00 |
| SUBTOTAL: SPECIAL PROGRAMS | \$ 98,600.85 | \$ 111,759.28 | \$ 121,907.74 | \$ 332,267.87 |

| AGENCY STATISTICS FY2025 | SEPTEMBER 2025 | OCTOBER 2025 | NOVEMBER 2025 | TOTAL |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------|
| Veterans In Office Visits | 396 | 339 | 256 | 991 |
| Calls Handled | 501 | 688 | 382 | 1571 |
| Outreach Events | 27 | 4 | 36 | 67 |
| New Veterans | 86 | 54 | 41 | 181 |

QoQ

| Assistance Description | 3rd Qtr (\$) | 4th Qtr (\$) | % QoQ |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| CTA Single Ride | 1,369.50 | 1,980.00 | 44.58% |
| CTA 7-Day | 6,355.00 | 5,863.00 | -7.74% |
| Mortgage | 29,704.30 | 31,356.24 | 5.56% |
| Rent | 28,689.95 | 63,084.60 | 119.88% |
| Electric | 32,447.75 | 31,781.11 | -2.05% |
| Gas | 25,782.61 | 21,211.13 | -17.73% |
| Water | 3,823.55 | 5,319.68 | 39.13% |
| Phone | 949.47 | 149.65 | -84.24% |
| Internet | 706.57 | 614.13 | -13.08% |
| Food Cards | 42,800.00 | 60,900.00 | 42.29% |
| Work Attire | 100.00 | 200.00 | 100.00% |
| Personal Hygiene Cards | 30,200.00 | 36,700.00 | 21.52% |
| Gas Cards | 500.00 | 300.00 | -40.00% |
| Burial & Memorial | 18,000.00 | 72,808.33 | 304.49% |
| Total | 221,428.70 | 332,267.87 | 50.06% |

Financial Disbursements

| Description | 2024 (\$) | 2025 (\$) | % Change |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| CTA Single Ride Card | 4,466.00 | 6,182.00 | 38% |
| Cta 7-Day Card | 26,219.50 | 23,862.00 | -9% |
| Shell Gas Cards | | 800.00 | |
| Mortgage Assistance | 84,998.58 | 89,446.23 | 5% |
| Rent Assistance | 167,655.89 | 155,952.78 | -7% |
| Food Card | 96,600.00 | 147,700.00 | 53% |
| Personal Hygiene Card | 55,100.00 | 91,700.00 | 66% |
| Work Attire | 500.00 | 400.00 | -20% |
| Electric Bill | 85,333.85 | 112,228.18 | 32% |
| Gas Bill | 76,835.15 | 85,880.67 | 12% |
| Water Bill | 14,773.95 | 17,922.97 | 21% |
| Phone | - | 1,099.12 | |
| Internet | - | 1,320.70 | |
| Burial & Memorial | 39,670.97 | 117,925.90 | 197% |
| Other | - | (2,597.60) | |
| Total Veteran Disbursements | 652,153.89 | 849,822.95 | 30% |

Demographic Data

| Description | 2024 | 2025 | % Change |
|------------------------|------|------|----------|
| Total Veterans Served | 2886 | 3428 | 19% |
| Male Veterans Served | 2498 | 2959 | 18% |
| Female Veterans Served | 382 | 469 | 23% |
| Other Veterans Served | 6 | | |

FY26 Org Chart & Budget



| Position | Employee |
|--|------------------------------|
| Veteran Service Officer | Karadsheh Faris |
| Manager, Communications & Outreach | Intress Conner Haig |
| Manager, Finance and Business Operations | Samuel Rajeev |
| Manager, Veterans Services | Giffin Derek |
| Manager, Veterans Services | Berry Justyna |
| Communications & Outreach Coordinator | Calderon Julian |
| Veterans Service Caseworker | Shaw Krystal |
| Veterans Service Caseworker | Bencak Peter |
| Administrative Assistant IV | Duarte Coral |
| Administrative Assistant IV | Meadows Vanessa |
| Deputy Superintendent | Jacobson Grant |
| Superintendent | Soto Elizabeth |
| Manager, Veterans Services | VACANT |
| Veteran Service Officer | VACANT |
| Veteran Service Officer | VACANT |
| Administrative Assistant IV | VACANT - NEW POSITION |
| Veteran Service Officer | VACANT - NEW POSITION |
| Veteran Service Officer | VACANT - NEW POSITION |
| Veteran Service Officer | VACANT - NEW POSITION |
| Manager, Communications & Outreach | VACANT - NEW POSITION |

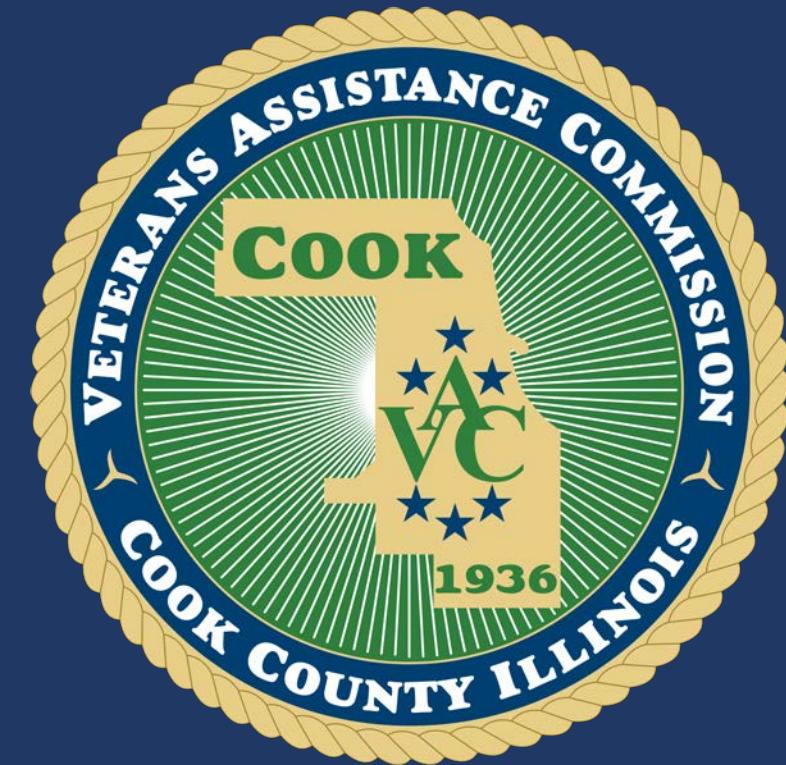
| Position | Employee | Update |
|---|--|--|
| Veteran Service Officer | Karadsheh Faris | |
| Manager, Communications & Outreach | Intress Conner Haig | - RECLASSIFYING |
| Manager, Finance and Business Operations | Samuel Rajeev | |
| Manager, Veterans Services | Giffin Derek | |
| Manager, Veterans Services | Berry Justyna | 69 W Washington |
| Communications & Outreach Coordinator | Calderon Julian | 69 W Washington |
| Veterans Service Caseworker | Shaw Krystal | |
| Veterans Service Caseworker | Bencak Peter | |
| Administrative Assistant IV | Duarte Coral | |
| Administrative Assistant IV | Meadows Vanessa | |
| Deputy Superintendent | Jacobson Grant | |
| Superintendent | Soto Elizabeth | |
| Manager, Veterans Services | VACANT | - RECLASSIFYING |
| | | 1 Administrative Assistant IV & |
| | | 1 Communications and Outreach Coordinator Positions |
| Veteran Service Officer | VACANT | 69 W Washington |
| Veteran Service Officer | VACANT | 69 W Washington |
| Administrative Assistant IV | VACANT - NEW POSITION | 69 W Washington |
| Veteran Service Officer | VACANT - NEW POSITION | |
| Veteran Service Officer | VACANT - NEW POSITION | |
| Veteran Service Officer | VACANT - NEW POSITION | |
| Manager, Communications & Outreach | VACANT - NEW POSITION - RECLASSIFYING | Finance and Business Operations Bureau Chief |

| Object Account | FY26 Adjusted Budget |
|--|----------------------|
| Sal/Wag of Reg Employees- Including Benefits | 1,766,035.49 |
| Prof /Tech Membership Fees | 16,024.40 |
| Training Program Staff | 26,921.38 |
| Transportation and Travel Expenses | 77,949.20 |
| Communication Services | 9,686.00 |
| Postage | 1,940.00 |
| External Graphics and Reproduction Services | 11,640.00 |
| Professional Services | 194,000.00 |
| Legal Services | 72,750.00 |
| Special or Coop Programs | 970,000.00 |
| Office Supplies | 48,500.00 |
| Maintenance and Subscription Services | 2,469.95 |
| | 3,197,916.42 |

Q4

September, October, November

VSO Report





VSO Mission Statement

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County provides clear, accurate, and accredited representation for Veterans and their families across all VA benefits.

Our VSO Program guides Veterans through claims, appeals, and complex benefit pathways with professionalism, integrity, and a commitment to securing the outcomes they have earned.

We work to remove barriers, strengthen the quality of every submission, and ensure that every Veteran receives the support and advocacy they deserve.

Strategic Objectives FY25

FY2025 Key Objective :

Build the operational tools, workflows, and standards necessary for consistent, efficient VSO service delivery in FY25.

Key Strategies:

- **Create standard VSO workflows** for intake, claim development, documentation, and follow-up so all Veterans receive predictable, high-quality service.
- **Establish basic tracking and reporting tools** to monitor claims submitted and Veteran engagement as the program expands.
- **Strengthen communication and coordination** between VSOs, leadership, and partner agencies to ensure Veterans are never left without support or guidance.
- **Provide foundational training** in core benefits (compensation, pension, PACT Act basics, health care enrollment) to ensure VSOs are confident and consistent in early service delivery.



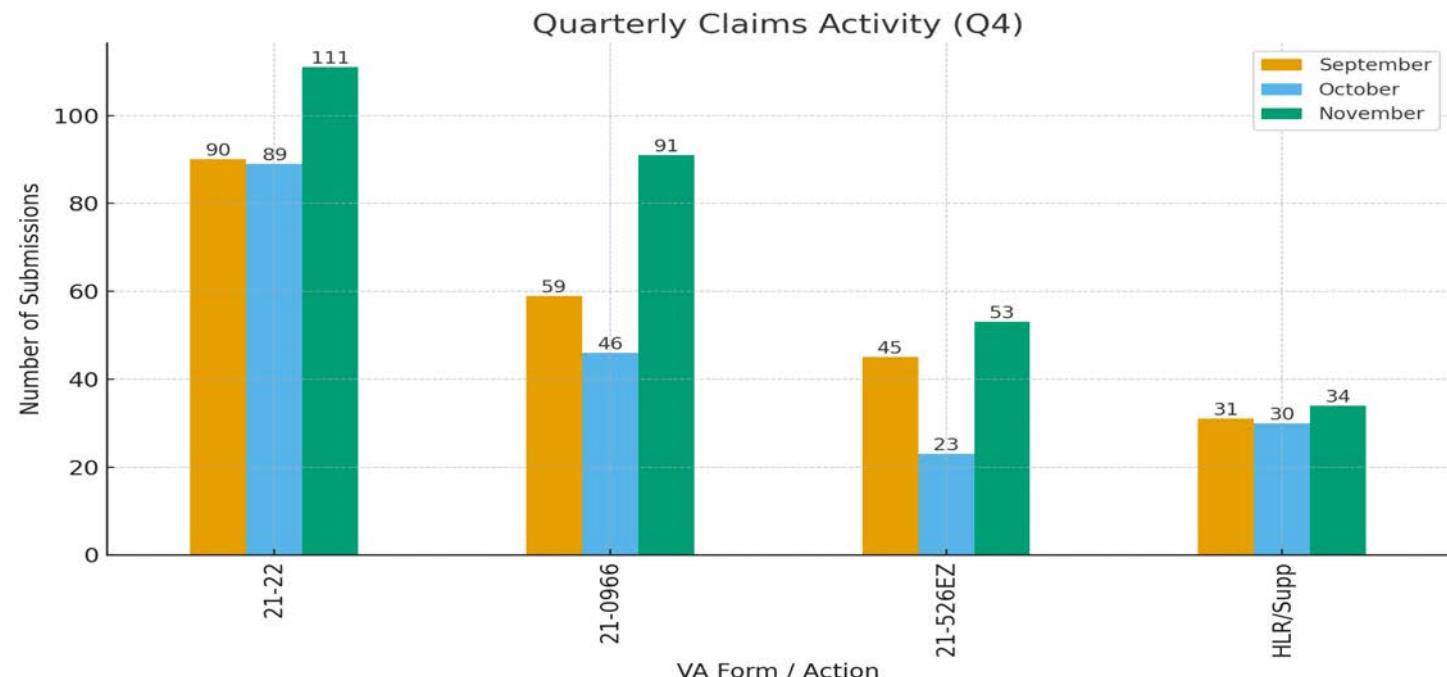
By the Numbers

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County continued strong claims activity throughout Q4.

- **Power of Attorney** designations remained high at 290 for the quarter, reflecting increased engagements and new Veteran enrollments.
- **Intent to File** submissions totaled 196, signaling a steady pipeline of future claims.
- New compensation claims submitted via **VA Form 21-526EZ** reached 121, while **Appeals and Decision Reviews** accounted for 95 filings.
- Overall, the numbers point to consistent outreach, higher Veteran contact, and strong case development heading into the next quarter.

VSO Q4 Data Breakdown

| VA Form / Action | Description | Sept | Oct | Nov | Q4 Total |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------|-----|-----|------------|
| VA Form 21-22 | Power of Attorney | 90 | 89 | 111 | 290 |
| VA Form 21-0966 | Intent to File | 59 | 46 | 91 | 196 |
| VA Form 21-526EZ | New Claims | 45 | 23 | 53 | 121 |
| Appeals / Decision Reviews | Higher-Level Review / Supplemental | 31 | 30 | 34 | 95 |





What this means for VSOs, Veterans, Caregivers, and Survivors

- This means that the VA is moving faster than ever with decisions on new claims and appeals.
- Please submit all required evidence at the front of end of submission. (such as private medical evidence, statements, and supporting evidence)
- If the VA is requesting from you, please submit timely.

What's happening in the VA?

VA reduces backlog of Veterans waiting for VA benefits by 57%

A VA claim for compensation or pension is considered backlogged once it has been pending for more than 125 days. The backlog reduction VA announced was made possible through a series of record-breaking production milestones, including:

- VA processed an all-time high of **3,001,734** disability compensation and pension claims in fiscal year 2025 - shattering the previous record of 2.49 million set in FY 2024.
- VA processed **one million disability claims** by Feb. 20 - faster than ever before in a given fiscal year.
- VA had its single most productive claims processing day, May 29, with **15,364** claims processed. In July, VA processed the highest number of claims in a month in history, with **300,799** claims processed.
- 12-month claims processing accuracy also improved to **93.5%** in September 2025, up from 91.6% in October 2024.
- VA's record-breaking FY 2025 performance also included distributing **\$195 billion** in compensation and pension benefit payments to more than **6.9 million** Veterans and survivors.



Expand VACCC Service Locations

- VACVSO@cookcountyl.gov contact email for VSO at VACCC.
- Grow the 69 W. Washington, Suite 1420 office into a **Military Sexual Trauma (MST) specialty emphasis location**, providing dedicated support and trauma-informed services. VSO Manager Justyna Berry.
- Open the **Rolling Meadows VACCC location** to expand access for Veterans in the Northwest region of Cook County. VSO Manager, Derek Giffin.

FY26 Looking a Year Ahead

Strengthen VSO Credentialing, Access, and Reporting

- Ensure **all VSOs are accredited through NACVSO** by the end of FY26.
- Complete full **VA system credentialing** for every VSO (PIV card, background clearance, encryption requirements).
- Provide **VA system access and training** to increase efficiency, accuracy, and Veteran support capabilities.
- Implement consistent **Vetra Spec documentation and updates** across all VSO activities to support countywide reporting, accountability, and performance tracking.
- **1100 S. Hamilton Lower-Level Chicago IL** is open Monday-Friday 8:30-4:30 (in person appointments Wednesday & Thursday)(Virtual Fridays) phone number 312-433-6010
- **69 W. Washington Suite 1420 Chicago IL** is open Monday-Friday 8:30-4:30 (in-person appointments Wednesday & Thursday.) (Virtual Fridays) phone number 312-603-3865



Welcome Our New Veteran Service Officer Faris Karadsheh!



VSO Q4 Department Updates

Faris joins the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County with a unique blend of federal claims expertise, military service, and a deep commitment to Veteran advocacy. He served **ten years** as a **Rating Veterans Service Representative (RVSR)** at the Chicago VA Regional Office, where he evaluated claims, applied the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities, and issued rating decisions shaping outcomes for countless Veterans.

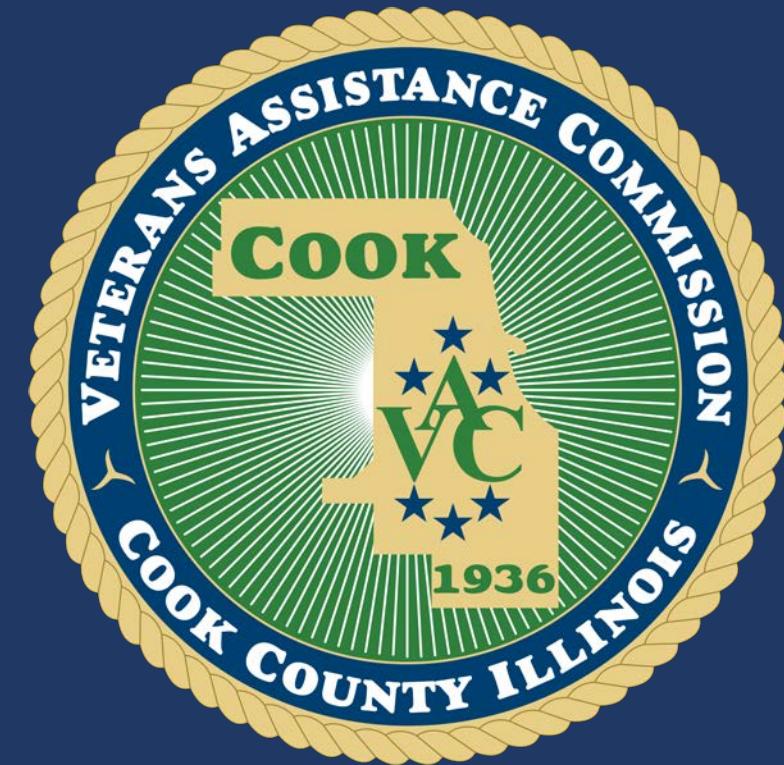
Faris is a **U.S. Army Veteran** who served as a 19K M1A2 Abrams Tank Crewmember at Fort Carson and as a 15P Aviation Operations Specialist at Hunter Army Airfield, including a deployment to Iraq. He holds a B.A. in Applied Psychology from UIC, strengthening his communication, administrative, and decision-making skills.

Known for integrity, detail orientation, and dedication to Veteran care, Faris is a tremendous addition to the VACCC.

Q4

September, October, November

Outreach Report





Outreach Department Mission Statement

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC) is committed to meeting Veterans where they are - delivering accredited services with intention, urgency, and equity. Through strategic, data-driven outreach, we engage Veterans in their own communities, prioritize underserved populations, and ensure timely, inclusive access to the benefits they've earned. Our work is grounded in action, guided by outcomes, and designed to close gaps - not wait for Veterans to navigate them alone.

Strategic Objectives FY25

Expand Community-Based Access to Veteran Services

Objective:

Deliver services directly to Veterans through trusted, accessible locations across Cook County.

Key Strategies:

- Establish permanent and rotating outreach schedules in underserved areas.
- Prioritize visibility at community events, shelters, churches, and Veteran-focused hubs.
- Eliminate access barriers by bringing services to Veterans instead of waiting for them to come forward.

Optimize Services Through Data and Responsiveness

Objective:

Use real-time data and outcome tracking to guide decisions, allocate resources efficiently, and adapt quickly to emerging Veteran needs.

Key Strategies:

- Make data-informed decisions on staffing, programming, and outreach deployment.
- Maintain responsiveness as a core standard – ensuring Veterans get answers and action, not delays.



QR Code Tracking Data

Metrics gathered through a program which tracks how often people use our QR codes. Captures areas scanned from, unique scans, as well as which QR codes they use.

- Intake Form QR Code Scan: **482**
- VACCC Web Page: **327**
- VACCC Facebook Page: **128**

Q4 Data Breakdown

The image shows a digital interface for QR code tracking. At the top, the word "Connect" is written in a large, green, sans-serif font, followed by "with us" in a smaller, green, sans-serif font. Below this, there is a large green QR code. To the right of the QR code, the acronym "VACCC" is written in green, and below it is the URL "HTTP://HOVQR.TO/85B409" followed by the number "22". Below the QR code, the text "Scan now to follow us on our social media" is written in green. At the bottom of the interface, there is another green QR code with the URL "HTTP://LINKTR.EE/Veterans_Assistance_Commission" written below it.

The image shows a digital interface for QR code tracking. At the top, the text "VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION COOK COUNTY" is written in large, green, sans-serif font. Below this, there is a smaller green QR code. To the right of the QR code, the text "Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center" is written in green. Below this, the address "1100 S. Hamilton Ave, C-011 (LL)Chicago, IL 60612" is written in green, followed by the phone number "(312) 433-6010" and the email "VACCC@cookcountyil.gov". At the bottom of the interface, there is another green QR code with the URL "HTTP://HOVQR.TO/D E421623" written below it. To the right of the QR code, the text "To speak to a representative and learn more about our services, please scan QR code or visit" is written in green.



Intake System Metric Breakdown

Metrics gathered through MS Forms.
Form captures name, number, email,
and service request, but does not
verify identity.

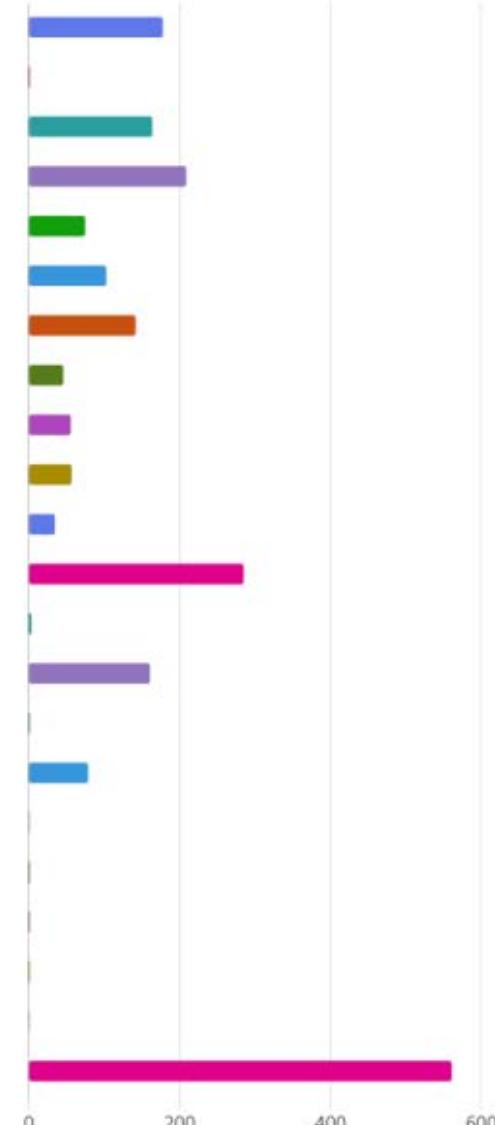
Total Assisted (all categories of intake
form submissions since start of
program): 482

Total individual services
requested: 2,145

Note: May include duplicates. Used
as indicator of outreach interest.

Q4 Data Breakdown

| | |
|--|-----|
| Rent/Mortgage Financial Assistance | 177 |
| Mental Health Services / Readjustment counseling (This will prompt contact from the... | 1 |
| Utilities (Electric/Gas/Water) | 163 |
| Food Assistance (Hundred Dollar Gift Cards) | 208 |
| Weekly Bus Cards - CTA/PACE | 74 |
| Vehicle Gas Cards | 102 |
| Hygiene card | 141 |
| Funeral/Burial Financial Assistance | 45 |
| Phone/Landline Financial Assistance | 55 |
| Internet Financial Assistance | 56 |
| Records Request (State and Federal) | 34 |
| File a claim | 284 |
| VA Benefits (This will prompt contact from VA) | 3 |
| State and Local Veteran Benefits | 160 |
| Housing Assistance (Homelessness) (This will prompt contact from VA) | 1 |
| Employment Assistance | 78 |
| Womens clinic (This will prompt contact from VA) | 0 |
| LGBTQ+ healthcare access (this will prompt contact from VA) | 1 |
| Military Sexual Trauma (MST) (This will prompt contact from VA) | 1 |
| Discharge upgrade - (This will prompt contact from the UIC School of Law) | 1 |
| Education Benefits (this will prompt contact from VA) | 0 |
| Other | 560 |





Intake System Updates

The intake form is now 100% outward-facing and is no longer used by VACCC staff for internal intake or routing.

It is exclusively designed for Veterans, survivors, and family members to directly request services online or through our marketing materials.

Q4 Intake Form Updates

Expand Access to Services and Increased Response Times

- New service request categories have been added including:** Mental Health Services, VA Benefits Modification (auto-routed directly to the VA), Housing Assistance, LGBTQ+ Support, Military Sexual Trauma (MST), Discharge Upgrades, and Education Benefits with partners at UIC, Loyola and Prairie State.
- Automatic confirmation and document-prep guidance is now built in.** When a Veteran selects one of our services, they immediately receive a response from us outlining the services requested and what documents they need to bring or prepare.
- Direct partner referrals for non-VACCC services.** If a Veteran selects a service that VACCC does not directly provide, the request is automatically routed to a trusted partner organization, which will follow up with the Veteran within **24–48 hours** to ensure immediate support.



**Scan NOW to see
the New Version!**



**Physical Copies will be coming
soon!**

Link: [Online Flipbook](#)

Q4 Updated Resource Guide

Streamlined with Everything you Need

- **The VACCC Resource Booklet has been fully reorganized** to evenly highlight VACCC services, IDVA programs, VA services, and partner resources in a clear, user-friendly format.
- **Core VACCC services are now centralized**, including Emergency Financial Services (EFS), Claims & Benefits Assistance, Partner Referrals, VSO appointment requests, and Outreach Event Requests.
- **Dedicated sections for IDVA and VA services now provide clear breakdowns of benefits**, flagship programs, medical care, mental health services, home care, and education assistance.
- **A new digital Partner Resource Booklet is being launched**, giving Veterans direct QR-code access to trusted partner organizations for immediate help.
- **Expanded QR codes and links throughout now connect Veterans to services**, scheduling, and location details for all VACCC, IDVA, and VA offices.



If you want to reach out to our team, scan this QR Code now!



Physical Copies will be coming soon!

Q4 Commission Request Form

If you have a question, concern, or recommendation

The QR Code Commission Request Form is a new, centralized communication tool designed to provide Board and Commission members with a clear, formal, and transparent method for submitting questions, concerns, and requests to VACCC leadership. This process ensures timely review, documented responses, and consistent follow-through.

Key Points

- **Creates a formal and centralized request channel** for Commissioners and Board members, replacing informal or fragmented communication with a consistent, documented process.
- **Automatically alerts VACCC leadership**, allowing requests to be triaged, assigned, and addressed efficiently and professionally.
- **Promotes transparency and accountability** by tracking each request, response, and outcome, ensuring all submissions are acknowledged and resolved.
- **Supports quarterly reporting and oversight**, with VACCC providing a summary of requests received and actions taken to demonstrate responsiveness and engagement.



FY25 Q4 Accomplishments

Direct Outreach Initiative:

- Launched April 7, 2025
- Events at churches, VFWs, elected officials' offices, and community spaces
- Sites selected using district-level Veteran density and underutilization data

Q4 Engagement Metrics (since program began):

- Events Attended: **30** (non-reoccurring office hours)
- Office Hour Visits: **37**
- Total Outreach Events: **67**
- Total Assisted (intake form submissions since start of program): **482**

Total Interaction of Veterans: 1,035

This includes all Veterans who attended each event

Q3 Engagement Metrics (Comparison):

- Events Attended: **29** (non-reoccurring office hours)
- Office Hour Visits: **32**
- Total Outreach Events: **61**
- Total Assisted (intake form submissions since start of program): **348**

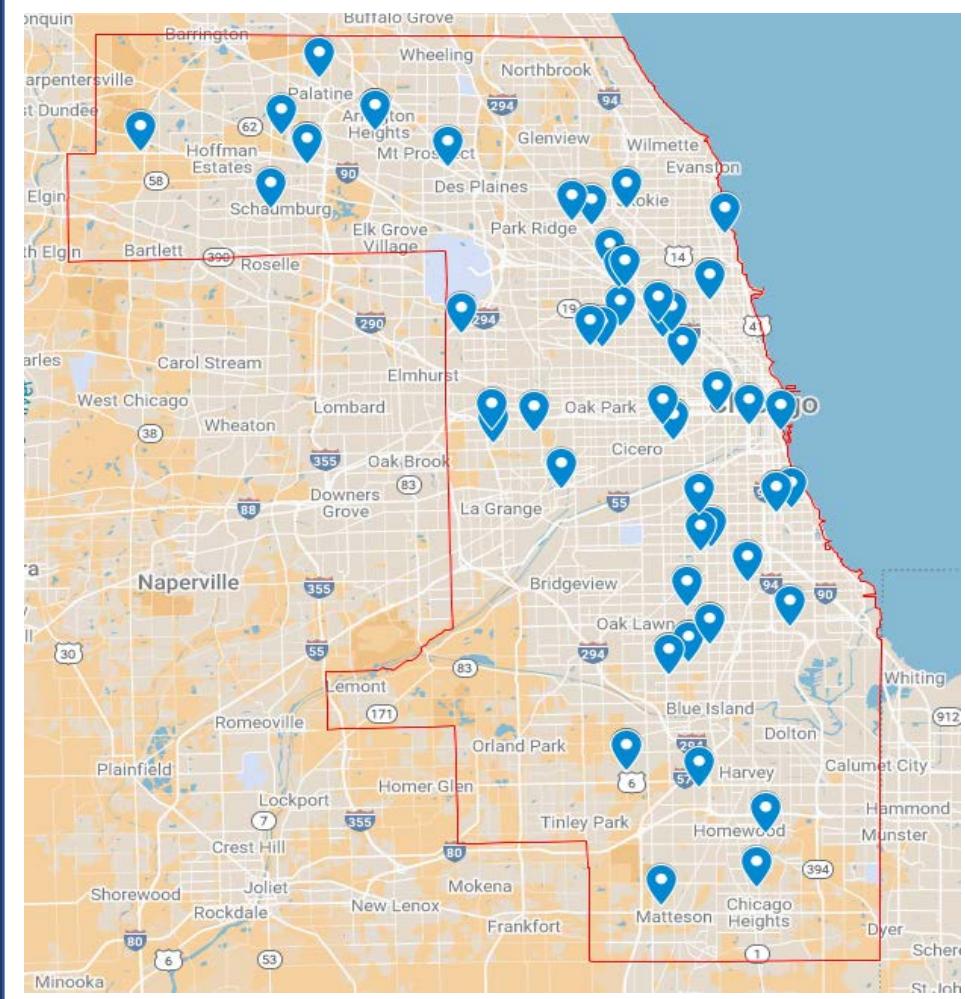
Total Interaction of Veterans: 809

This includes all Veterans who attended each event

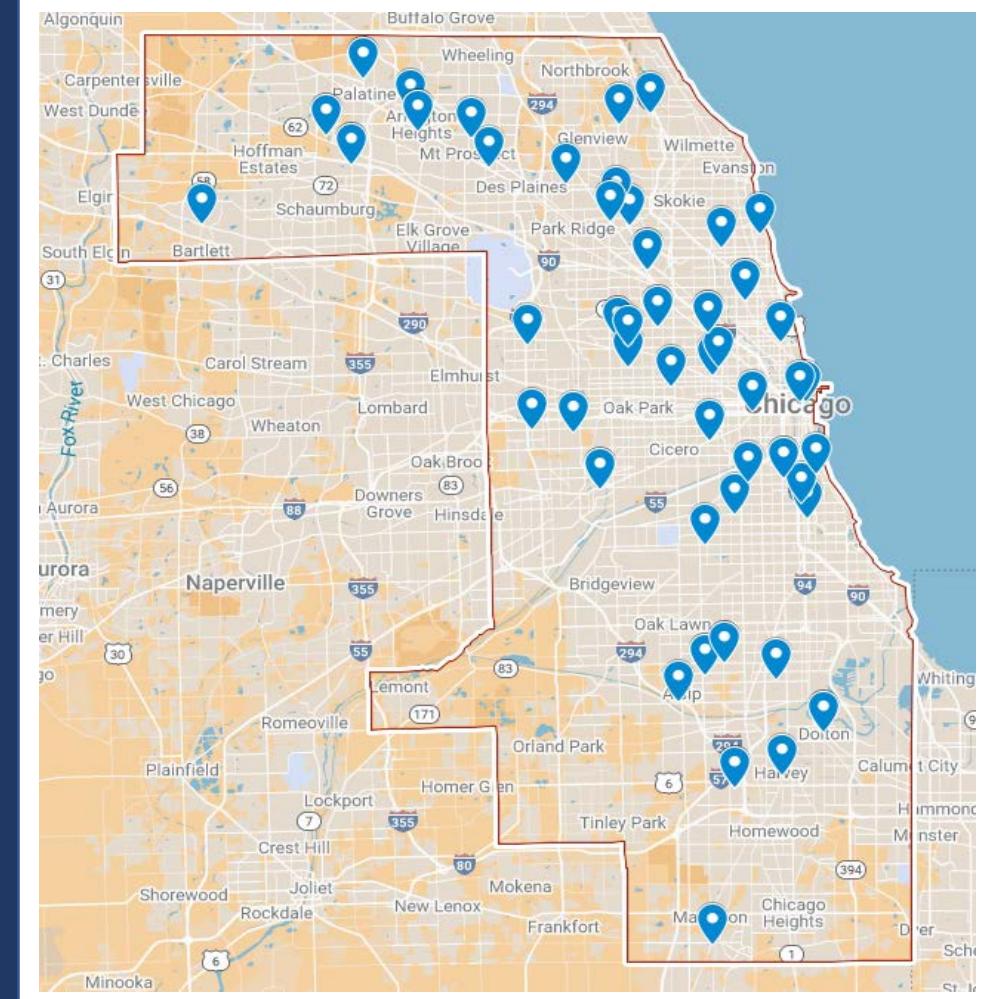


FY25 Q3 and Q4 Comparison

Q3 Event Distribution (61 Events)



Q4 Event Distribution (67 Events)





FY25 Q3 Event Listings

| COUNT | DATE | EVENT | LOCATION |
|-------|-----------|--|--|
| 1 | 9/2/2025 | Alderman Villegas (Office Hours) | 6934 W Diversey Ave, Elmwood Park, IL 60707 |
| 2 | 9/3/2025 | Office Hours, Commissioner Maggie Trevor (9th) | 220 W Campbell St, Arlington Heights, IL 60005 |
| 3 | 9/3/2025 | 45th Ward office hours | 5460 N. Milwaukee, Chicago, IL 60630 |
| 4 | 9/4/2025 | 2025 City of Chicago Procurement Symposium | 1900 W Jackson Blvd, Chicago, IL 60612 |
| 5 | 9/4/2025 | Commissioner Kevin Morrison, Office Hours | 1325 Wiley Rd, Schaumburg, IL 60173-4310 |
| 6 | 9/8/2025 | Worth Township Vet Presentation - Vet-talk | 11601 S Pulaski Rd, Alsip, IL 60803 |
| 7 | 9/9/2025 | Niles VFW Post 3579 | 7255 N. Caldwell Ave., Niles, Illinois 60714 |
| 8 | 9/9/2025 | Alderman Lopez (Office Hours) | 2650 West 51st Street Chicago, IL 60632 |
| 9 | 9/9/2025 | Commissioner Dr. McCaskill District Office Hours | 15441 Turlington Ave, Harvey, IL 60426 |
| 10 | 9/10/2025 | Harper College | 1200 W Algonquin Rd, Palatine, IL 60067 |
| 11 | 9/10/2025 | Commissioner Miller's (Office Hours) | 14037 Lincoln Ave, Dolton, IL 60419 |
| 12 | 9/10/2025 | Commissioner Tara Stamps Office Hours | 6614 W. North Ave. Chicago, IL 60656 |



FY25 Q3 Event Listings

| COUNT | DATE | EVENT | LOCATION |
|-------|-----------|---|--|
| 13 | 9/12/2025 | Office Hours, Commissioner SCOTT R. BRITTON | 1812 Waukegan Road, Glenview IL 60025 |
| 14 | 9/12/2025 | Alderman Matt Martin (Office Hours) | 4243 N Lincoln Ave, Chicago, IL 60618 |
| 15 | 9/13/2025 | 2025 VFW Post 311 Resource Fair | 22341 Governors Highway, Richton Park, IL 60471 |
| 16 | 9/13/2025 | New Life Covenant Church, Veterans Resource Fair 2025 | 3400 W Division St, Chicago, IL 60651 |
| 17 | 9/15/2025 | Alderman Anthony Napolitano, 41st Ward Office Hours | 7442 N Harlem Ave, Chicago, IL 60631 |
| 18 | 9/16/2025 | ECC Resource Event | 5000 S 5th Ave, Hines, IL 60141 |
| 19 | 9/16/2025 | Commissioner Jessica Vasquez Office (Office Hours) | 2934 N. Milwaukee Ave. Unit C Chicago , IL 60618 |
| 20 | 9/17/2025 | Commissioner Dr. Kisha E. McCaskill (Office Hours) | 3039B West 159th Street Markham, Illinois 60428 |
| 21 | 9/17/2025 | State Representative Nabeela Syed Office Hours | 700 N North Ct, Palatine, IL 60067 |
| 22 | 9/23/2025 | Commissioner Frank Aguilar Office Hours | 7833 Ogden Ave. Lyons, IL 60534 |
| 23 | 9/24/2025 | Alderman Matt O'Shea Office Hours | 3207 W. 111th St. Chicago, IL, 60655 |
| 24 | 9/24/2025 | Alderwoman Maria Hadden, Office Hours | 1447 W Morse Ave, Chicago, IL 60626 |



FY25 Q3 Event Listings

| COUNT | DATE | EVENT | LOCATION |
|-------|------------|--|--|
| 25 | 9/26/2025 | Alderman Nicole T. Lee (Office Hours) | 3659 S. Halsted St. Chicago, IL 60609 |
| 26 | 9/26/2025 | Salvation Army Kroc Center HPACT Medical Mobile Unit (MMU) Event | 1250 W 119th St, Chicago, IL 60643 |
| 27 | 9/30/2025 | VA Housing Education Seminar (Commissioner Alma Anaya) | 3843 W 63rd St, Chicago, IL 60629 |
| 28 | 10/7/2025 | Alderman Villegas - 36th ward Office Hours | 6560 W Fullerton Ave, Chicago, IL 60707 |
| 29 | 10/15/2025 | SALUTE TO OUR ARMED FORCES Resource Event | 5000 West 127th Street, Alsip, IL 60803 |
| 30 | 10/18/2025 | Cosmopolitan Church Vet Talk | 5249 S Wabash Ave, Chicago, IL 60615 |
| 31 | 10/29/2025 | VA Housing Education Seminar (Commissioner Morrison) | 401 Irving Park Rd, Streamwood, IL 60107 |
| 32 | 11/1/2025 | VA Housing Education Seminar (Commissioner Maggie Trevor) | 601 N Main St, Mount Prospect, IL 60056 |
| 33 | 11/4/2025 | Alderman Timmy Knudsen (Office Hours) | 2523 N. Halsted Street Chicago, IL 60614 |
| 34 | 11/5/2025 | Alderman James M. Gardiner (Office Hours) | 5460 N. Milwaukee, Chicago, IL 60630 |
| 35 | 11/5/2025 | Office Hours, Commissioner Maggie Trevor (9th) | 220 W Campbell St, Arlington Heights, IL 60005 |
| 36 | 11/6/2025 | Alderwoman Debra Silverstein (Office Hours) | 2949 W Devon Ave, Chicago, IL 60659 |



FY25 Q3 Event Listings

| COUNT | DATE | EVENT | LOCATION |
|-------|------------|---|--|
| 37 | 11/6/2025 | Commissioner Kevin Morrison, Office Hours | 1325 Wiley Rd, Schaumburg, IL 60173 |
| 38 | 11/7/2025 | Maine Township Veterans Breakfast | 1700 Ballard Rd, Park Ridge, IL 60068 |
| 39 | 11/7/2025 | Cook County Commissioner Alma E. Anaya & U.S. Representative Jesús "Chuy" García Resource Event | 2210 W Pershing Rd, Chicago, IL 60609 |
| 40 | 11/7/2025 | Veterans Celebration at the Niles-Maine District Library | 6960 W Oakton St, Niles, IL 60714 |
| 41 | 11/7/2025 | Metra Veterans Luncheon | 147 W 47th St, Chicago, IL 60609 |
| 42 | 11/8/2025 | Leyden Township Resource Faire | 2601 N Mannheim Rd. Franklin Park IL 60131 |
| 43 | 11/8/2025 | Luthar Village Veteran Breakfast | 1250 N Village Dr, Arlington Heights, IL 60004 |
| 44 | 11/10/2025 | Worth Township Outreach | 11601 S Pulaski Rd, Alsip, IL 60803 |
| 45 | 11/10/2025 | Chicago Cultural Center – Renaissance Court Senior Center (Alderman Conway) | 78 E Washington St, Chicago, IL 60602 |
| 46 | 11/11/2025 | Veterans Day Bagel Breakfast | 161 Northfield Rd, Northfield, IL 60093 |
| 47 | 11/12/2025 | Harper College Office Hours | 1200 W Algonquin Rd, Palatine, IL 60067 |
| 48 | 11/12/2025 | Commissioner Michael Scott, Jr. (Office Hours) | 3600 West Ogden Ave, Chicago, IL 60623 |



FY25 Q3 Event Listings

| COUNT | DATE | EVENT | LOCATION |
|-------|-------------------------|--|--|
| 49 | 11/12/2025 | Commissioner Tara Stamps Office Hours | 6614 W. North Ave. Chicago, IL 60656 |
| 50 | 11/13/2025 | Commissioner Miller's (Office Hours) | 14037 Lincoln Ave, Dolton, IL 60419 |
| 51 | 11/13/2025 | Alderman Matt Martin (Office Hours) | 4243 N Lincoln Ave, Chicago, IL 60618 |
| 52 | 11/14/2025 | VA 2025 Chicago Winter Standdown | 1551 N Kedzie Ave, Chicago, IL 60651 |
| 53 | 11/15/2025 | Stand Up Veteran's Day Event | 4941 W. Chicago Ave, Chicago IL 60651 |
| 54 | 11/17/2025 | Alderman Villegas (Office Hours) | 6934 W Diversey Ave, Elmwood Park, IL 60707 |
| 55 | 11/18/2025 - 11/20/2025 | CCAO Homeowner Resource Fair | 118 N Clark St, Chicago, IL 60602 |
| 56 | 11/18/2025 | Frisbee Senior Center | 52 E Northwest Hwy, Des Plaines, IL 60016 |
| 57 | 11/18/2025 | Alderman Anthony Napolitano, 41st Ward | 7442 N Harlem Ave, Chicago, IL 60631 |
| 58 | 11/18/2025 | Commissioner Jessica Vasquez Office (Office Hours) | 2934 N. Milwaukee Ave. Unit C Chicago , IL 60618 |
| 59 | 11/19/2025 | Commissioner Dr. Kisha McCaskill Office Hours | 3039B West 159th Street Markham, IL 60428 |
| 60 | 11/20/2025 | Westchester Township | 10300 W Roosevelt Rd, Westchester, IL 60154 |



FY25 Q3 Event Listings

| COUNT | DATE | EVENT | LOCATION |
|-------|------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 61 | 11/20/2025 | Alderman Ruth Cruz (Office Hours) | 5418 W Belmont Ave, Chicago, IL 60641 |
| 62 | 11/20/2025 | Government Access Fair | 5418 W Belmont Ave, Chicago, IL 60641 |
| 63 | 11/21/2025 | Alderman Nicole T. Lee (Office Hours) | 700 N North Ct, Palatine, IL 60067 |
| 64 | 11/24/2025 | Alderman Lamont Robinson, 4th Ward | 3659 S. Halsted St. Chicago, IL 60609 |
| 65 | 11/25/2025 | Veterans New Beginnings Resource Brief | 435 E 35th St, Chicago, IL 60616 |
| 66 | 11/25/2025 | Commissioner Frank Aguilar Office Hours | 7833 Ogden Ave. Lyons, IL 60534 |
| 67 | 11/26/2025 | Alderman Matthew O'Shea - office hours | 3207 W. 111th St. Chicago, IL, 60655 |
| | | | |
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Department Updates

- As our outreach model continues to evolve, any updates regarding staff reorganization, position alignment, or refinements to the outreach plan configuration will be communicated clearly as they are finalized. These adjustments are intended to better align our internal structure with operational needs, maximize limited staffing capacity, and strengthen overall service delivery. Additional briefings will be provided to ensure transparency, continuity, and alignment.

FY26 Looking a Year Ahead

Streamlined with Everything you Need

- Use a full year of outreach data to refine targeting, identify service gaps, and improve geographic coverage.
- Strengthen systems and processes to improve efficiency and reduce staff workload.
- Continue expanding key service pillars: VetConnect, VetTalks, resource navigation, and referral services.
- Maximize staffing capacity by creating scalable, repeatable systems and digital service pathways.
- Increase focus on digital products, automated tools, and online access points for Veterans.
- Expand marketing materials and standardized outreach collateral to improve visibility and consistency.
- Leverage partner organizations to amplify VACCC services and extend reach into local communities.

Local community
Local government
Local Veterans
Working together to serve
those who served us