

## CVSO GRANT FUNDING

As required by Wisconsin State Statute (Wis. Stat. §45.80) county boards are required to elect or appoint a County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) who must be a resident of Wisconsin and has served honorably on active duty. Also, federally recognized Indian tribes and bands may appoint a Tribal Veterans Service Officer (TVSO) who must be a veteran and serve as a full-time employee. The duties of the CVSO/ TVSO are to advise veterans living within their county about benefits they may be eligible for, and to assist veterans with any issues they may be experiencing based on their service. The CVSO/ TVSO is also statutorily required to report to the county board, work with federal and state agencies that serve veterans, and provide the necessary information on veteran burial locations within the county, amongst other duties.

The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) has the authority to award grants to counties that have a CVSO/ TVSO. For those counties that have a full-time CVSO, the statutory grant amounts range from \$8,500 to \$13,000, based on population. Annually, the grant to CVSOs is funded at \$761,000 statewide. The WDVA shall reimburse a TVSO twice yearly for documented expenses up to \$15,000 per grant.

It was determined during the 2015-17 state budget negotiations the grant program would transition from a block grant to a reimbursement program with new definitions of grant-eligible expenditures. This significant change had unintended consequences due to the lack of rule making and communication between the state and counties. The program is now very difficult and time consuming for the CVSOs/ TVSOs. Ultimately, this change detracts from the goals of the CVSOs/ TVSOs and the WDVA, which is to be a place of support for our veterans, as well as advocate on their behalf.

**CURRENT STATUS:** The current CVSO/ TVSO “reimbursement system” is administratively cumbersome for CVSOs/ TVSOs and also severely limits the array of veterans services eligible for reimbursement.

**REQUESTED ACTION:**

- Return the CVSO/ TVSO reimbursement system and grant-eligible expenditures back to the block grant that existed prior to changes made in the 2015-17 state budget. Request that this change be made in the 2017-19 state budget.

- Require oversight of the CVSO/ TVSO grant requests be done by the county executive or administrator who will certify that the grant dollars are expended according to state statute and that it is done in the best interest of all Wisconsin veterans.
- Provide additional funds for the block grant to CVSOs/ TVSOs.

**TALKING POINTS:**

- The CVSO/ TVSO grant program was intended to assist counties in offering services to veterans by providing state grants based on population ranging from \$8,500 to \$13,000 for full-time CVSOs and up to \$15,000 for TVSOs.
- The grant program was significantly changed in the 2015-17 state budget by transitioning the funds from a block grant to a reimbursement program.
- The transition was done with the best of intentions and with the support of WCA; however, the unintended consequences have made the new process cumbersome and difficult for the CVSOs/ TVSOs to receive the funds they need to help our state's veterans.
- Returning the funds to a block grant, with oversight from the county executive or administrator, is in the best interest of all and most importantly, in helping our veterans.
- Additional funds for the reinstated block grant would help our state's CVSOs/ TVSOs provide the necessary assistance to veterans seeking their help in obtaining benefits and helping in times of a crisis.

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