

WHITMAN COUNTY

VETERANS' RELIEF FUND – POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the Whitman County Veterans' Relief Fund, hereinafter called Veterans' Relief Fund, is to provide for the relief of indigent veterans, their families, and the families of deceased indigent veterans as defined in RCW 41.04.005 and 41.04.007. The intent of the veterans' relief program is to provide model programs that benefit veterans and family members facing financial hardship.

Funds Generated

The Veterans' Relief Fund is generated from a tax levied by the Whitman County Board of County Commissioners. Use of the fund is governed by RCW 73.04.070, 73.04.080, and 73.08.005 through 73.08.090, and these policies and procedures.

Payment limits for specified purposes

The Veterans Relief Fund has three specified payment limits which are as follows:

- Individual Assistance - \$4,000 per year
- Burial costs - \$1,000 per occurrence
- Annual Post hall rent and/or operation cost assistance of \$500 per year for Posts willing to assist qualified Veterans seeking Veterans' Relief assistance. A signed annual *Post Cost Assistance Form** from the Post should be on file with the County before the \$500 is issued.

Program Assistance to Individuals

- Only eligible veterans and eligible family members of veterans may receive assistance from the Veterans' Relief Fund. The eligible veteran or eligible family member must have a financial need and must provide documentation proving their need to receive assistance from the fund.
- There is no automatic annual entitlement to assistance and the provision of assistance is subject to the availability of funds. The assistance provided may include financial assistance for certain purposes, including homeless shelter services, case management services, referral services and other programs that benefit eligible veterans and eligible family members.

Veterans' Advisory Board

- Per RCW 73.08 the Whitman County Veterans' Advisory Board (VAB) was established on May 5, 2008 by resolution 068153 of the Board of County Commissioners. The VAB provides advice to the Whitman County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) on the needs of local indigent veterans, the resources available to local indigent veterans, and programs that could benefit the needs of local indigent veterans and their families. A Post Service Officer (PSO), the County's Veteran Services Officer (VSO) or any member of the VAB shall aid applicants in applying for assistance from the Veterans' Relief Fund.

Financial Assistance to Individuals

➤ Eligibility

In order to receive assistance from the Veterans' Relief Fund, the veteran or family member must meet the eligibility criteria of RCW 73.08 and Whitman County as outlined in this section. Veterans or eligible family members must provide documentation verifying eligibility for assistance.

➤ Veteran and Family Member Status

An applicant for assistance from the Veterans' Relief Fund must be a veteran or the family member (as defined in RCW 73.08.005) of a veteran who meets the definition of veteran set forth in RCW 41.04.005 or RCW 41.04.007.

➤ Residency

Applicants must have been residents of Washington State for at least six months immediately prior to obtaining assistance from the Veterans' Relief Fund.

Applicants must have been residents of Whitman County for at least 60 days immediately prior to obtaining assistance from the Veterans' Relief Fund. Post office boxes cannot be used to establish residency.

➤ Indigence

Applicants must be indigent as defined by RCW 73.08.005 - receiving an annual income, after taxes, of up to one hundred fifty percent or less of the current federally established poverty level.

- Income received during the 60-day period prior to the date of application shall be annualized to determine an annual income.
- Income includes all funds received by the applicant and their spouse or domestic partner, and all other individuals who will benefit from the assistance.
- Applicants who report no income for the previous 30 days must provide additional documentation showing their means of support and verification.
- Examples of included income which must be reported on the Veterans' Relief Fund application for the purpose of determining income eligibility are listed on the following page.

Examples of Included Income:

- money, wages and salaries after any deductions;
- net receipts from self-employment;
- savings;
- worker's compensation;
- alimony;
- veterans' compensation and disability
- military family allotments or other regular support from an absent family member or someone not living in the household;
- retirement, pension (including veterans' pension) and annuities;
- insurance payments;
- dividends, interest, and periodic receipts from estates or trusts;
- labor and industries payments;
- unemployment compensation;
- child support;
- social security other than supplemental security income;
- foster child payments;
- tax refunds, gifts, loans, lump-sum inheritance, one-time insurance payments or compensation for injury or death;
- dependency and indemnity compensation for service-connected death;
- educational assistance benefits (including veterans' educational assistance benefits not paid directly to the school for tuition and books), vocational rehabilitation subsistence allowance, and work-study benefits (including veterans' work-study benefits).

Note: grants, loans and veterans' educational assistance for tuition and books paid directly to the training institution are not included income.

Application Procedures

The applicant must complete a Request for Veterans' Relief Fund packet, which includes (at a minimum) the following:

- *Veteran's Relief Fund Assessment Form**
- *Requisition on Veteran's Assistance Form**
- *Request for W9 and Payment Form**
- If the veteran is requesting a direct payment, then a *Veteran Direct Payment Form** will need to be completed.

***All forms are available on the Whitman County Veteran Service Officer's Website or by request to the Whitman County Finance department.**

Incomplete applications will be returned to the applicant and must be resubmitted.

This packet shall be completed by the Veteran with assistance from the local Post Service Officer (PSO) or the Whitman County Veteran Service officer (VSO). It is the responsibility of either the PSO or the VSO to properly review the entire packet for verification of adequate documentation, form completion and eligibility. If the request does not meet eligibility requirements it may not be resubmitted.

If the completed application is accepted by the PSO or VSO, then the entire package will remain in a secure file (paper or electronic) housed by either the PSO or VSO, and follow the retention requirements of Washington's Office of the Secretary of State. This information may be needed for future audits by County or the State Auditor's office (SAO). The PSO or VSO will forward only the following to the Finance Staff member designated by the Auditor:

- *Requisition on Veteran's Assistance Fund Form and required receipts*
- *Request for W9 and Payment Form*
- *Veteran Direct Payment Form (if applicable)*

Verification of limits:

The County Finance staff member will verify that the requisition is still within the \$4,000/year annual limit that has been set by the VAB for financial assistance. Once this requisition has been vetted at the finance level, it will be forwarded to the BoCC to act upon at its next regular meeting. If the requisition amount would ultimately cause the veteran's annual benefits to exceed the VAB's \$4,000 limit, then the County staff member will forward the request to the Veteran's Advisory Board for special approval.

Procedure for Exceptions:

If there are unusual or special circumstances regarding the application, (e.g. the request exceeds annual limits or it's questionable as to whether the veteran meets eligibility requirements), the VSO or PSO will forward the "Requisition on Veteran's Assistance Fund" form (that was included in the packet) and required receipts or other documents, along with an explanation of the special circumstances and any relevant information, to the VAB for its consideration. The VAB Chair will provide a written recommendation to approve, limit or reject the application for assistance, to the designated County Finance staff member. If approved or limited, the staff member will then forward only the "Requisition on Veteran's Assistance Fund" form and required receipts or other documents along with the recommendation of the VAB to the BoCC for action. The BoCC will act at the next regular meeting after receipt of the recommendation. If the request is rejected by the VAB, the VSO/PSO will return the entire application packet to the applicant with a written explanation of the reasons for rejection.

Application Time Period

Applications are valid for 90 days. It is the applicant's responsibility to report any changes in status during this 90-day period of time. After 90 days a new application must be completed.

Assistance Provided

All applications for assistance require approval by the VSO or PSO and may require additional approval of the VAB (if the requested amount puts the received benefits past the annual \$4,000 limit) prior to approval by the BoCC. A decision on a payment may be delayed in order to obtain further eligibility verification. Lost or stolen payments may not be reissued.

Certification

Applicants applying for assistance are required to sign a statement certifying that the information provided is complete and accurate and that if discovered to be otherwise the applicant shall be denied assistance from the fund. The veteran or eligible family member shall also authorize the VSO/PSO and the VAB (if necessary) to verify the accuracy of the information provided by the applicant.

Financial Assistance

Financial assistance may be provided to eligible veterans and eligible family members to assist with basic needs such as rent, food, transportation and utilities.

➤ Maximum Allocation

Eligible veterans and/or family members may receive up to \$4,000 in financial assistance in a calendar year.

➤ Limitations

Eligible veterans or family members who receive financial assistance for two consecutive calendar years may not draw upon the fund for one complete calendar year following the second year of financial assistance received from the Veterans' Relief Fund.

The maximum allocation that will be paid to an eligible veteran or family member who has received assistance from a veterans' assistance fund in another Washington county within the past 12 months will be reduced by the dollar amount received from the other county.

Types of Financial Assistance

a) Rent or Mortgage Assistance

- Eligible veterans or family members may receive assistance with past due rent, first and last month's rent, past due mortgage payments, or nonrefundable deposits on the applicant's residence.
- The applicant must provide a written rental agreement or documents proving ownership of the property. The veteran or eligible family member must be able to sustain rent or mortgage payments in the months to come.
- Payments for rental assistance will be paid directly to the property owner, property management company or the owner's legal representative. Rent payments will not be made to family members.
- Past due rent will be paid only for the applicant's primary residence.
- Mortgage payments will be made directly to the mortgage lender and will only be paid for the applicant's primary residence.

b) Motel Stays

- Motel and hotel stays may be approved by the PSO, VSO or the VAB. Such stays shall be limited to 30 days. The VAB will need to approve any stay extensions after that. The facility must be located in Whitman County.
- In the event that an immediate need for shelter occurs, the VSO and PSO are authorized to pay for 1-2 rooms (as needed) until the next available business day (thus this stay would cover a weekend), at which time the situation will be further vetted.

c) Utilities

- Eligible veterans or family members may receive assistance with utilities, including power, water, garbage, propane and wood. Other utility services such as telephone, cable or internet services will not be paid, unless there are family members in the home that require those services for their education, job or well-being.

- The applicant must provide a utility bill, a shut-off notice or letter of impending disconnection from the power, water or garbage company showing the current amount owed. Payment shall be made directly to the utility company and may include shut-off and reconnection fees.
- Payment shall be made to an account in the veteran or eligible family member's name only. Utilities shall only be paid for the residence where the veteran or eligible family member currently resides.

d) Food/Hygiene

- Veterans or eligible family members may receive assistance with food and certain personal hygiene items. Payment for these items will be made directly to the vendor, if at all possible. If payment is made directly to the veteran or family member, that person will be required to sign a Cash Receipt Affidavit.

e) Clothing

- Clothing may be provided to a veteran or eligible family member. Payment for these items will be made directly to the vendor, if at all possible. If payment is made directly to the veteran or family member, that person will be required to sign a Cash Receipt Affidavit.

f) Transportation

- Bus passes may be provided for transportation within Whitman County.

g) Burial or Cremation Services

- Up to \$1,000 may be provided for the burial or cremation of any deceased indigent veteran or deceased family member of an indigent veteran who dies without leaving means sufficient to defray funeral expenses.

- Documentation showing the burial or cremation expenses to be incurred must be provided prior to receiving financial assistance. Payment will be made directly to the vendor.
- h) Service Organization Hall Rent or Operational Cost Assistance:
 - up to a limit of \$500 annually
- i) Vehicle Repair:
 - Up to \$4,000 annually
- j) Other Requests:
 - Other requests for financial assistance that are not listed in this policy/procedure shall be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the VSO/PSO and VAB with the goal of providing basic needs.

Waiver

The VAB may recommend the waiver of certain requirements, time periods and/or the amount of financial assistance set forth in these policies and procedures, excluding state law requirements. This shall be done only when there is a specific, documented need or circumstance which establishes the individual's need for financial assistance. The Board of County Commissioners is required (Per RCW 73.08.010) to make the final approval or rejection of a request for financial assistance.

Denial of Services

Whitman County may refuse service to disorderly or disruptive individuals including those who intimidate or threaten a public servant or attempt to do so.

Applicants who have been denied assistance may request a review of the denial by the BoCC. The BoCC Chair (or their designee) may request additional information in order to make an informed decision and shall issue a decision within 10 days of receiving the information. The BoCC's decision is final.

Administration of the Fund

Once the application for financial assistance has been approved for payment by the BoCC, the signed and completed "Requisition on Veteran's Assistance Fund" will be forwarded to the Finance Department (overseen by the Auditor's Office) for payment.