



**Nancy S. Switzer
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To: AVVA State Presidents/Representatives
VVA State Presidents
AVVA Officers and Board of Directors
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From: Nancy S. Switzer, Interim Director,
AVVA Service Officer Program

Date: January 31, 2010

Re: AVVA Service Officer Program

As you are aware, on July 11, 2009, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) accepted Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America, (AVVA), as a service officer organization. We are very proud of this, especially after all the many long hours that were put in to this accomplishment. The first step will be to train our core individuals who will manage the program. We are hoping that our first training session will be in May 2010. At this time, we are dependent on the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) to do our training, until we can hire a Director of our own. So, with that said, I want to educate you on the process as follows:

1. **Membership Criteria.** All Applicants must be members of AVVA for two (2) years prior to applying to be trained, with no lapse in membership and must be a member in good standing.

2. **Application.** Working with VVA, an AVVA application has been designed; this is not a VVA application. Ours is designed differently. We feel that if a person is seeking to become a service officer for AVVA, they need to know what is expected of them, for example: reporting on their case load, the magnitude of, and willing to perform, reading/writing/research. That is why we have decided that an

Applicant must go through the NVLSP Program first before going through the VVA Service Officer training.

In order to ensure the quality of AVVA's Veteran Benefits Program, the essential requirements for admission to the training course are as follows:

- Dedication to helping disabled veterans and their family members
- Organization skills, responsibility and trustworthiness
- Sufficient financial support

There are also certain legal requirements for accreditation as a service officer. The Applicants must:

- 1) be a member in good standing of AVVA; *or*
- 2) be a paid employee of AVVA or an AVVA State Association, Associated Chapter, or Chapter and working not less than 1000 hours annually; *or*
- 3) be an employee of a county veterans service agency and working not less than 1,000 hours annually; *and*
- 4) must not be employed by any civil or military department or agency of the Federal government. *See 38 C.F.R. § 14.629. I*

In addition, AVVA must be able to certify to the VA that the Applicants is a person of good character and reputation. *See 38 C.F.R. § 14.629(a)(1)*. Please keep these criteria in mind, since Applicants who do not meet them, cannot be accredited as an AVVA service officer. The VA Office of the General Counsel (which administers the VA accreditation program) also has a policy of requiring clarifying information where the Applicant is a veteran who has a less than an honorable discharge from active military service (e.g., a general discharge, even if under honorable conditions, dishonorable discharge, etc.). Remember, the VA has the discretion not to accredit anyone, even if the individual is nominated by a veteran's service organization.

Applicants who want to attend training so that they may learn how to prosecute their own claims for benefits generally do not serve as service officers either very well or very long. Moreover, if an Applicant is currently receiving VA or Social Security Disability Insurance Benefits on the basis of individual unemployability or for a substantial psychiatric disability, accreditation and employment as a service officer may be considered as evidence to demonstrate that his or her condition has improved. Such evidence may therefore serve as the basis for a VA rating reduction or for the severance of VA or Social Security Benefits. To reduce AVVA's liability, Applicants who currently suffer from a service-connected psychiatric disorder rated 50% or higher may not be eligible for training. In these situations, deference will generally be given to the discretion of the nominating State Associates Representative's/President's assessment of an Applicant's fitness for training, accreditation and working as an AVVA accredited service officer. The National Veterans Benefits Program, however, reserves the right to review such assessments.

Nominees for training *must* be approved and sponsored by the AVVA State Association/State AVVA Representative or the National Service Officer Director of the Service Officer Program in which the trainee resides, and for the state in which the trainee will be handling claims (if different from the state of residence). Nominees that will be sponsored by an AVVA Chapter or Associated Chapter must have the approval of its respective State to send the student for training. Please note that there will be a part of the training application for the appropriate State President/Representative to complete.

In other words, when you are approving an Applicant for this position you will have to interview this person and get a feel of whether they can do this type of work, whether they realize the magnitude of reading/writing/researching that is involved. I would suggest that each of you speak to your State VVA Presidents to get a feel of the questions they ask the individuals who are seeking accreditation.

3. **Cost.** The cost of an individual to go through the Service Officer training is approximately \$1,800.00.

This of course varies depending on airfare and lodging. The National Board passed a motion that for qualified Applicants, they will fund the NVLSP Program cost, travel and lodging. When the Applicant passes the final exam, then AVVA will buy the NVLSP books and the Service Officer books/CD Rom.

4. **Selection Process.** The selection of Applicants will be done confidentially and with the utmost respect. The National Board has appointed two Special Advisors who are admired nationally in their positions as Service Officers and have many years of experience as Service Officers. The Applicants will be chosen in other words, not by whom you know, or what you wear, but done with respect. When the Interim Director receives the applications, the name will be crossed out and a number will be assigned to that set of application. The applications will then be sent to the two Special Advisors who will review and make the necessary decisions.

I hope that this has given you some sense of the program. Please understand that we are in the infancy of this program. As soon as I receive the date for the training in May, I will then send you the application form. If you should have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am excited to be working with you in our new venture.

Very truly yours,

Nancy S. Switzer

Nancy S. Switzer,
Interim Director

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