



## Veterans Task Force: Year in Review





# Multnomah County Veterans Task Force: Year in Review - 2016

## Background

There are an estimated 44,378 veterans who reside in Multnomah County, more than any other county in the State of Oregon. This diverse group represents service men and women from four different generations who bring a variety of assets, needs, and perspectives to this community. The Veterans Task Force was established in April, 2010, through passage of Board of Commissioners Resolution No. 2010-037. This advisory group was charged with locating and assessing the services provided by Multnomah County to veterans, locating barriers, and identifying opportunities for change and improvement of services.

Chaired by Commissioner Diane McKeel, the Task Force is comprised of representatives from multiple county departments and select community groups and organizations with expertise in the levels and types of assistance provided to veterans. There is strong collaboration among service providers in Multnomah County, so task force presentations include briefings on county programs as well as services available in the community and partnership opportunities between agencies.

In 2016, Commissioner McKeel appointed a Veterans Task Force Executive Committee with eight members representing various departments of Multnomah County and select community groups and organizations. The eight members included: Commissioner McKeel as Committee Chair, a representative from the County's Department of County Human Services for service delivery expertise, Department of Community Justice for public safety expertise, Multnomah County Veterans Service Office, a community member who is a veteran, a Portland Veterans Affairs representative, a representative from a local nonprofit partner, and an education or workforce representative. Upon formation, the Executive Committee alternated monthly meetings with the full networking Task Force to advise on county policy to change and improve services, and provide formalized oversight on the Veterans Task Force workplan.

## Veterans Task Force Workplan

The Task Force's 2016 workplan continued its focus on multiple issues impacting veterans that as identified in the Multnomah County Community Covenant<sup>1</sup>, with a different issue discussed each month. Upon formation of the Executive Committee in April, the full networking Task Force meetings had primarily informational presentations on these issues while the agendas for Executive Committee meetings were largely focused on follow-up work sessions and action items for the County to implement. All Veterans Task Force meetings are public and group discussion is encouraged, regardless of whether it is an Executive Committee meeting or not.

As the Task Force transitioned this year into a more formalized policy advisory role with an emphasis on action steps it considered narrowing down the scope of issues covered in the work plan. Members acknowledged the difficulty going into depth on ten separate issues, and at the September meeting refined the work plan for future years to three key focus areas:

### *1. Housing Instability*

Vision: We are committed to preventing and diverting veterans and military families from becoming homeless, re-housing those who have become homeless, and assist veterans to access affordable and adequate housing.

Issues for Further Analysis:

- Advocate for veteran housing and education about landlord recruitment through agency newsletters, social media, and Veterans Task Force member outreach.
- Advocate for a housing system for veterans that is adequately and sustainably funded, including veterans who are not eligible for VA or other subsidized programs.
- Increase county programmatic involvement with the veteran by-name list, and advocate for engagement by other appropriate local and state agencies.

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<sup>1</sup> Community Covenant with Veterans and Military Families. (2013, November 7). Retrieved from <https://multco.us/file/30474/download>.

- Identify Veterans Task Force members to participate on the Home for Everyone committees and the Point in Time Count planning efforts to bring a veteran perspective. Report back opportunities for further analysis and data collection efforts.

## 2. Comprehensive Veteran Wellness

Vision: We are committed to strengthening the integrated community engagement with veterans and their families so they receive the best possible medical care with VA and non-VA providers to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Issues for Further Analysis:

- Explore partnership with VA and County Health Department services, the Unity Behavioral Health Center, and other community health care agencies, especially for veterans not eligible for VA health care.
- Work toward a “no wrong door” model for a warm handoff between providers in this partnership. Promote education, potentially in an open house format or public event, between partners to streamline process as a veteran moves between service providers.
- Build stronger partnerships with Home for Everyone subcommittees, including health care, housing, and Home for Every Veteran.

## 3. Economic Development and Financial Sustainment for a Veteran and their Family

Vision: We are committed to ensuring that veterans have representation for compensation and pension claims, access to and retention of employment opportunities, and education and training to meet their career goals.

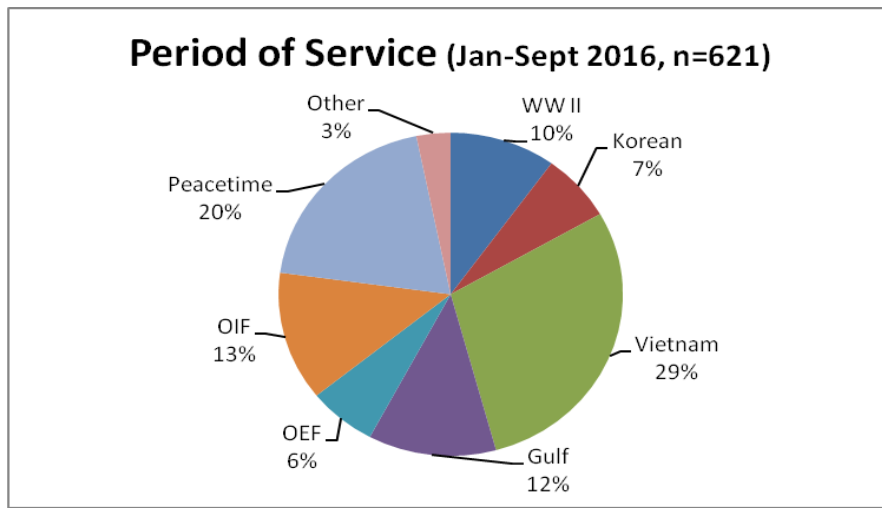
### Issues for Further Analysis:

- Build greater community awareness about veterans preference in public employment.
- Research opportunities to promote community and continuing education for veterans interested in going back to school or career. Explore adapting the county model for College to County and Leadership Academy to increase veteran involvement in these programs.
- Advocate for improved access to higher education or career advancement opportunities, including occasions for greater flexibility with required testing, experience and certification for veteran candidates.
- Increase outreach and awareness of experiences of historically underserved veterans, including aging, LGBTQ, and families.

## Veterans Data

The Multnomah County Veterans Task Force continually seeks to promote policy and partnerships informed by all available data. In the past, this information was primarily available at the state or national level so it was difficult to identify trends specific to this local community.

In 2015, the County Veterans Service Office implemented a questionnaire to track demographic information of veterans who come in contact with the office. The Task Force reported on this initial data in its 2015 Year in Review, and prioritized additional data collection as a focus area for this year's work. The data collection in this section of the report was collected on voluntary surveys conducted each time a veteran or referral agency contacts the County Veteran Service Office.

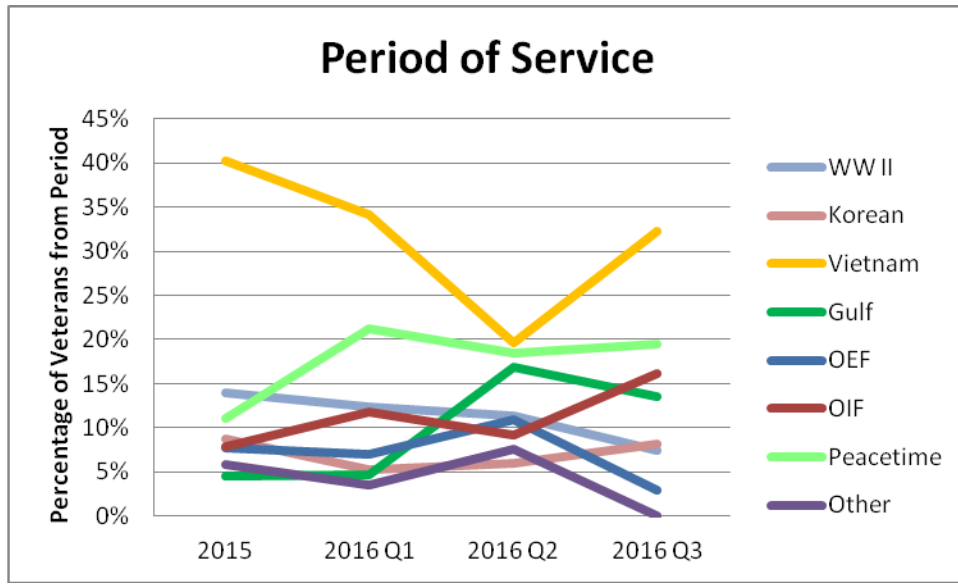


This graph represents the period of service of veterans who contacted the Veterans Service Office for services. Data is not available on the period of service of all veterans in Multnomah County, but the statewide data in Oregon Department of Veteran's Affairs 2015 Annual Report<sup>2</sup> indicates that World War II Era veterans have come in for services at a higher rate (10% of CVSO contacts though they are 5.5% of the state veteran population), potentially because this aging population is in greater need of benefits and other services. Additionally, this data reports

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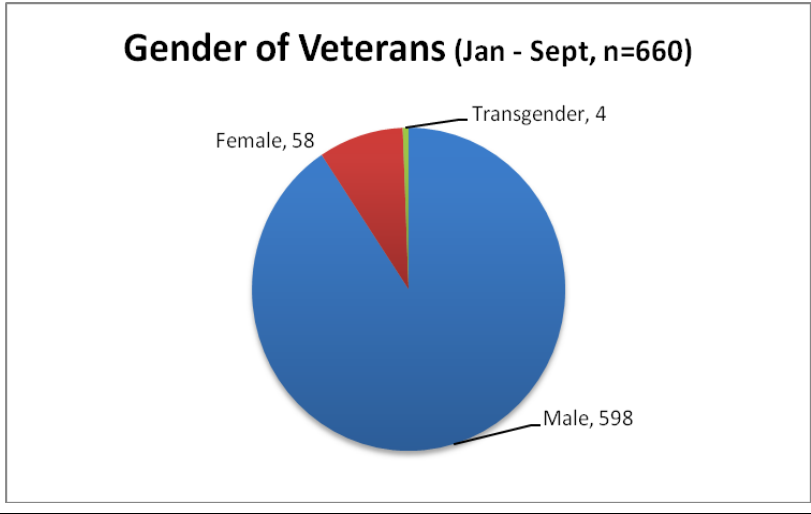
<sup>2</sup> We Are Oregon Veterans: 2015 Annual Report to the Governor. (2015). Retrieved from: [http://www.oregon.gov/odva/INFO/docs/2015%20ODVA%20Annual%20Report\\_web.pdf](http://www.oregon.gov/odva/INFO/docs/2015%20ODVA%20Annual%20Report_web.pdf)

higher rates of Gulf War/OIF/OEF contacts (31%) than the proportion of Gulf War Eras reported by ODVA (24%), while Vietnam Era veterans were under-represented with 29% of CVSO contacts while they make up 36% of the statewide veteran population.

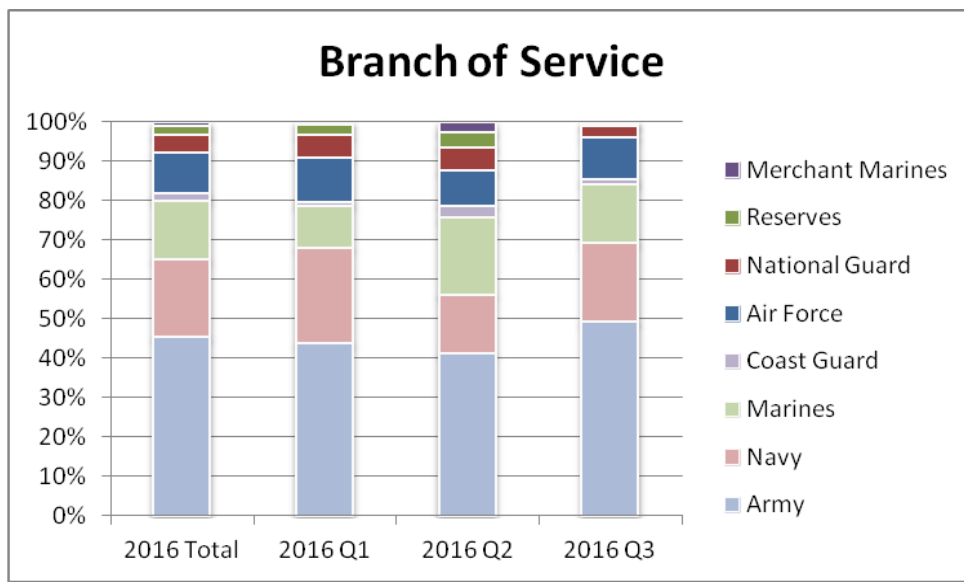
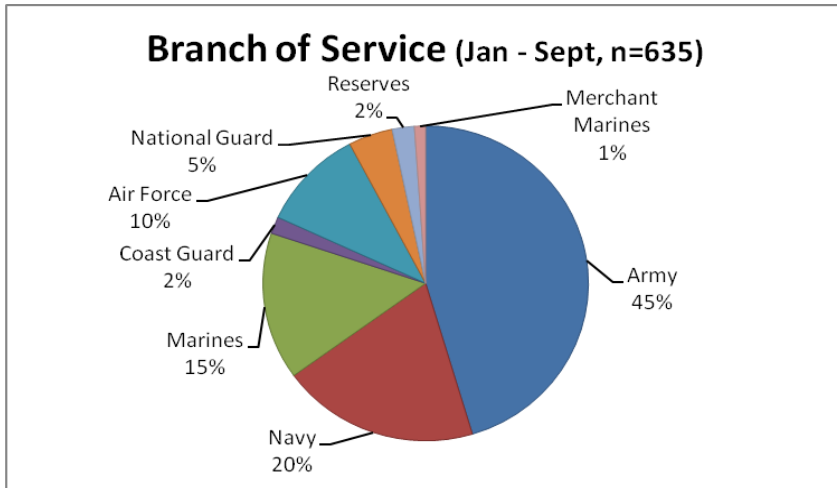


The chart above represents the trend of veterans from different periods of service contacting the Multnomah County Veterans' Services Office. While the pie chart reports all contacts between January and September of 2016, this chart tracks the same data from 2015 and each of the first three quarters of 2016 to better understand changes over time. As expected, the smaller sample sizes result in higher variance between data points, but general trends indicate a moderate decrease in the percentage of Vietnam Era veterans and an increase in Peacetime, OIF and Gulf Era veterans contacting the Veterans' Service Office. Additional data will further inform these trends and guide future outreach efforts to veterans in the County.





Male veterans represented nearly 91% of contacts to the County Veterans' Services Office. Multiple initiatives have been launched in 2016 to better connect with underserved veteran populations, including outreach work of the Veterans Services VISTA project, the Oregon Department of Veterans' Services Women Veterans Services Coordinator, and awareness events such as the *She Also Served* summit in November. These efforts seek to improve outreach to women veterans and build awareness and cultural competency among providers.



Veterans who served in the Army have contacted the County Veterans' Services Office at a higher rate than veterans from other branches. The pie chart above represents all data from 2016, and the bar graph reports the data from all of 2016 as well as each of the first three quarters of the calendar year. Nearly 80% of all contacts to the office have consistently come from veterans who served in the Army, Navy or Marines.

## Veterans Task Force Accomplishments

- Continued support for the partnership between Oregon National Guard Child and Youth Program and the Gresham-Barlow School District. Task Force submitted a letter of support to each school district in the County to implement a military child identifier on registration materials.
- Presentations about multiple County programs with subsequent Task Force discussion about how they could be expanded to support additional veterans. Opportunities discussed included the College to County internship program and additional internship relationships through various County departments, Multnomah County Guardianship program, and the Home for Every Veteran housing initiative.
- Hosted panel discussion about college support programs for veterans with representatives from Portland State University, Portland Community College, and Concordia University. Task Force identified barriers that students who are veterans face, both culturally and logistically, and strategies to effectively provide supports on campus and in the classroom.
- Legislative briefing and updates on proposed legislation at the state and federal level.
  - Presentation on all bills introduced during 2016 Oregon Legislative Session identified as having an impact on veterans. Discussion of potential impacts on services and on veterans in Multnomah County, with updates by Association of Oregon Counties Veterans Services Committee staff and Commissioner McKeel, Committee Co-Chair.
  - Regular updates on federal issues related to veterans services, as identified by the National Association of Counties Veterans and Military Service Committee. Specific issues included continued funding and flexibility for housing programs, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016, drill pay overpayment, VA funding for medical disability examinations, and priorities for Oregon's federal delegation.
- Reviewed quarterly reports on demographic information of veterans who connected with the County Veterans Service Office. Outreach efforts to underserved populations will be a key focus for the Veterans Services VISTA project and the Task Force will continue to track data

trends. Additional data was presented on employment trends between the veteran and non-veteran population, between male and female veterans, and different eras of service.

- Presentations to promote awareness of available services. Specific presentations included:
  - Updates and presentations on planning efforts for the Portland Stand Down and the East County Stand Down, within information on their status, barriers, and ways for Task Force members to support this work.
  - Consistent meeting participation with Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs, including presentations by the statewide Women Veterans Coordinator, LGBT Veterans Coordinator, and overview of aging services as they intersect with local county programs.
  - Presentation from VA Portland Health Care System on quarterly town hall events with VBA, My VA community initiative, Community Employment programs, the VA Choice program, Fisher House and primary care facility on the Vancouver campus, and the Fairview CBOC Clinic opening in March of 2016.
  - Overview of Oregon Housing and Community Services funding for veteran housing efforts using funds from document recording fee. These funds support housing development, home ownership, and emergency housing. Veterans Task Force received information on recent grant recipients as well as information on future requests for proposals.
  - Multnomah County Domestic Violence program presented on available services provided by the County and local partners as well as opportunities for cross training and collaboration on events.
  - Birch Community Services presented on product available to participating veterans, and the community service and training components of the program.
  - Returning Veterans Project provided overview of current services, new partnerships, and data trends related to women veterans.
  - Overview of the Multnomah County Aging, Disability and Veterans Services Division 2017-2020 Area Plan, which has been updated to include a section on veterans services.