



Housing and services for homeless veterans

*Outcomes from Volunteers of America's
HVRP-funded grant programs*

J U N E 2 0 1 3

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Summary

Volunteers of America's Services for Homeless Veterans

Volunteers of America is one of the largest service providers to homeless veterans in the nation. Between July 2011 and June 2012, the organization served more than 1,700 veterans in over 12 cities with funding from the Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP).¹ This program is intended to serve homeless veterans with employment training and assistance. Volunteers of America's portfolio of services for homeless veterans includes service centers, housing, and employment training designed to meet the specific needs of veterans.

Background and purpose of this report

In April 2013, Volunteers of America's national office contracted with Wilder Research, a nonprofit research organization in Saint Paul, Minnesota, to update its initial evaluation of 2010 HVRP programs by analyzing program performance data gathered by 2011 HVRP affiliates. The results of Wilder's data analysis are summarized in this report.

Key findings

Characteristics of populations served

- HVRP programs primarily serve African American and Caucasian men over 45 years old.
- HVRP programs continue to reach specialized populations of homeless veterans, such as those with disabilities and those who are chronically homeless.
- The total reported number of enrolled HVRP program participants nearly doubled between 2010 and 2011-12 evaluation periods.²

Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program Results

- Volunteers of America's 2011 HVRP grantees exceed standards in providing job training to enrolled participants: 84 percent of clients received training (the federal benchmark is 80%).

¹ The number of veterans served was calculated from 2011-2012 HVRP affiliates data. Twelve of 14 affiliates reported, and thus the actual numbers of veterans served is higher than those reported here.

² The number of affiliates evaluated in each year is similar (11 affiliates in 2010 and 12 in 2011-12).

- The grantees' Entered Employment Rate outperforms the 2011 national average (53% versus 47%).
- Volunteers of America's HVRP program participants' wages are substantially higher than the national average: \$10.41 per hour at time of employment (compared to \$8.13 in the U.S. overall).
- However, consistent with 2010 findings, 2011-12 HVRP participants had difficulty retaining their jobs: Fifty-two percent of Volunteers of America program participants who became employed while in the program still had a job at 180 days. (This is substantially lower than the national average Employment Retention Rate for HVRP participants in 2011, which is 79%).

Issues to consider

Wilder Research recommends the following enhancements to Volunteers of America's affiliate data practices:

- Centralized data reporting from each HVRP affiliate on a quarterly basis. HVRP grantees are required by the Department of Labor to report data on a quarterly basis; however, obtaining data reports from DOL requires an official data request. Requiring VOA HVRP affiliates to report directly to Volunteers of America (as well as to DOL) would circumvent this time-consuming process and may help to standardize data reporting practices among affiliates.
- A 270 day measure to enhance the Department of Labor 90 day and 180 day measures (EER and ERR, respectively). A 270 day measure is not required by DOL, but may be helpful for VOA program planning.

Due to VOA HVRP affiliates' below-average Employment Retention Rate and other considerations, Wilder Research recommends a qualitative follow-up study that will:

- Contextualize successes and challenges experienced by HVRP affiliates
- Measure the extent to which HVRP programs coordinate with other federally or state funded veterans' programs as well as local service providers
- Focus on innovative components of the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, such as its veterans outreach efforts

Overall, the results of this study clearly indicate that Volunteers of America's HVRP-funded programs are consistently:

- Providing services that help veterans attain employment
- Preparing veterans for jobs with wages that exceed the national average wage
- Assisting a substantial number of veterans with specialized needs, such as veterans with disabilities or those who are chronically homeless.

The underperformance in Employment Retention Rates by 2010 and 2011 HVRP programs may suggest veterans are somehow less employment-ready, or less able to access ongoing supportive services, than the veterans being placed by other programs. However, more research, drawing on data from a larger sample of HVRP programs or qualitative data collection and analysis, is necessary to form any specific recommendations for program improvement.

Introduction

Background

Volunteers of America has provided housing and supportive services for homeless veterans since 1987, when the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs began to collaborate with community service providers in an effort to expand services to meet the needs of an increasing number of veterans in crisis. Today, Volunteers of America is one of the largest service providers to homeless veterans in the nation. Between July 2011 and June 2012, the organization served more than 1,700 veterans in over 12 cities with funding from the Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP).³

Their portfolio of services for homeless veterans includes service centers, housing, and employment training designed to meet the specific needs of veterans. More specifically, Volunteers of America currently operates:

- Transitional housing for veterans
- Homeless Veterans Re-Integration Programs
- Permanent supportive housing programs for homeless veterans
- Transitional housing programs, licensed as alcohol and drug treatment centers
- Service centers
- Mobile Service Center
- Special needs grants for the chronically mentally ill and frail elderly
- Incarcerated Veterans Transitional Programs (employment)

Many of the programs and services provided to homeless veterans are funded by the Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP). This program is intended to serve homeless veterans with employment training and assistance. Some Volunteers of America affiliates participating in the HVRP grant program also focus on specific high-needs subpopulations such as disabled veterans or veterans of a particular service era. HVRP grants are awarded annually, based on a competitive application

³ The number of veterans served was calculated from program year 2011 (July 2011-June 2012) HVRP affiliate data. Due to data limitations, the reported number underrepresents the actual number of veterans served by VOA HVRP affiliates in program year 2011.

process, but HVRP grantees are eligible for up to three years of funding, depending upon their overall performance.

Through their direct support via service centers, housing, and supportive services, coupled with outreach and advocacy efforts for veterans experiencing or at-risk for homelessness, Volunteers of America will play an integral role in the federal initiative to end homelessness among veterans by 2015.⁴

Context and purpose of this report

In Spring 2013, Volunteers of America’s national office contracted with Wilder Research, a nonprofit research organization in Saint Paul, Minnesota, to update its initial evaluation of 2010 HVRP affiliates by analyzing program performance data gathered by 2011 HVRP affiliates. The purpose of this research effort is to better understand the characteristics of HVRP program services and clients and to provide a clearer sense of how HVRP affiliate programs have performed between funding years. Wilder’s findings are summarized in this report.

⁴ In 2010, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness released a collaborative plan “Opening doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness.” One of the key goals of the plan was to “prevent and end homelessness among veterans in five years.”

Study methods

Like all federal grantees, participants in the HVRP programs are required to collect some standardized program performance data, which they must report to their federal funders on a regular basis. For example, HVRP programs must report their “common measures” to the Department of Labor every quarter.

In April 2013, Volunteers of America’s national office contacted affiliates with homeless veteran’s services and asked them to submit their most recent 12-month-cycle of federal performance data for analysis by Wilder Research. The period covered is for clients served between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2012.

The national office’s data collection effort included 14 Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program affiliates across the country. Between April and May 2013, Wilder Research received 12 HVRP reports (86% response rate).

Volunteers of America affiliates included in this evaluation:

- VOA of Greater New Orleans
- VOA of Greater Ohio (Cleveland)
- VOA of Greater Ohio (Columbus)
- VOA of Greater Ohio (Dayton)
- VOA of Florida (Cocoa)
- VOA of Florida (Miami)
- VOA of Kentucky (Knoxville)
- VOA of Kentucky (Huntington, West Virginia)
- VOA of Los Angeles
- VOA of Northern Rockies
- VOA of Illinois
- VOA of Michigan

All of the information submitted to Wilder Research was entered into a database and grouped into common outcome areas whenever possible. However, some program’s data had to be excluded from Wilder’s analysis because it was incomplete or did not fall readily into any common outcome group or category.

Data limitations

The findings of this report are impacted by three issues relating to both data collection and data quality:

1. Wilder Research received most, but not all, of the 2011 HVRP affiliates' data (12 of 14 affiliate's submitted data); in some cases, there was missing information on specific data items.
2. HVRP affiliates did not remain consistent between 2010 and 2011 program years. Only seven HVRP affiliates reported data for both evaluation periods, making comparisons more difficult. Because of these data inconsistencies, caution should be used when interpreting comparisons between years.
3. Some comparisons are made to a previous Wilder Research report published in 2011 (covering activities for 11 grantees during calendar year January-December 2010); this report covers the 2011 program year (covering activities for 12 grantees during the 2011 program year July 2011-June 2012).

Since Volunteers of America is currently engaged in an effort to move all of its affiliates to a common data collection platform (the online information management system, SharePoint), some of these data limitations may cease to be an issue in future years—making a more comprehensive and definitive analysis of cross-site outcomes possible. However, at the present time it is important to note that many of the results and trends reported here are based on a fairly limited data set, which is not fully inclusive of all affiliates' activities and outcomes.

Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (Employment services and training)

Overview

The Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program is administered by the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) within the U.S. Department of Labor. It was the first nationwide program designed to specifically place homeless veterans in jobs. The specific objectives of the program are to:

- Provide services to assist in reintegrating homeless veterans into meaningful employment within the labor force; and
- Stimulate the development of effective service delivery systems that will address the complex problems facing homeless veterans.

HVRP is "job-focused;" however, it also addresses the issues or needs of homeless veterans that affect their ability to become employed, such as physical or mental health issues, substance abuse, and basic needs such as housing, clothing, and food. Intake assessments are conducted with each client, and they may be referred to these supportive services prior to becoming enrolled in HVRP. Organizations or agencies who apply for HVRP funding must provide detailed information about their capacity to provide supportive services and/or their coordination and linkages with other service programs (preferably specialized to meet the needs of veterans) funded by other federal agencies, workforce centers, and transitional and permanent housing programs.

Once enrolled, program staff develops Individualized Employment Plans (IEP) to better coordinate the employment and training services each client receives, establish employment goals, and track employment placement and retention. Homeless veterans are offered a variety of employment and training services through HVRP to prepare them to reenter the labor force, including:

- Classroom training
- Job search activities
- Job preparation
- Subsidized trial employment

- On-the-job training
- Job placement
- Placement follow-up services
- Vocational counseling

According to the information provided in May 2013, Volunteers of America operates 19 HVRP programs across seven states. Fourteen programs were a part of the 2011 cohort. HVRP programs based in Louisville and Cleveland have been profiled as best practice models by the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (2004).

Client demographics

Organizations receiving HVRP funding are required to submit quarterly federal reports through the VETS web-based system (VOPAR). The reporting format, called Common Measures, is highly standardized and detailed instructions and technical assistance are available to all grantees. This data collection strategy allows the federal government to evaluate the program's effectiveness over time and allows grantees to track all participants engaged in the program (whether they were successfully placed in a job or not).

Accordingly, nearly all of the VOA affiliates who provided information about their HVRP programs (12 of 14) were included in Wilder's analysis with little difficulty.

As Tables 1 and 2 show, Volunteers of America's HVRP grantees are primarily serving African American or Caucasian males between 45 and 54 years old who served in the military more than 20 years ago. Overall, the reported number of total veterans served nearly doubled between years (918 in 2010 to 1,709 between July 2011 and June 2012).

1. Gender and age of clients served July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012

<i>Number of programs: 12</i>	Number	Percent
Total clients served	1,709	
Gender		
Male	1,565	92%
Female (a)	144	8%
Age		
18-19 years old	2	<1%
20-24	55	3%
25-29	86	5%
30-34	106	6%
35-44	290	17%
45-54	761	45%
55-64	384	22%
65 years old and older	25	1%
Ethnic background		
African American	875	51%
Caucasian	713	42%
Hispanic	85	5%
Native American	9	1%
Other	27	2%

Source: *Common Measures Technical Performance Report (TPR) submitted by VOA HVRP grantees.*

Notes: *Twelve grantees supplied seven quarters of data within the study period of 07/1/2011 – 03/30/2013. Demographic data does not include the 270 day follow-up period of 7/1/2012 – 03/30/2013.*

(a) Of the 144 women served by these grantees, nearly one-third (46) was served by a single grantee, the Michigan HVRP program.

2. Military service of clients served July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012

	Number	Percent
Total clients served	1,709	
Last military service		
0-3 Years Ago	156	9%
4-7 Years Ago	113	7%
8-11 Years Ago	83	5%
12-15 Years Ago	71	4%
16-19 Years Ago	138	8%
20+ Years Ago	1,148	67%

Source: *Common Measures Technical Performance Report (TPR) submitted by VOA HVRP grantees.*

Notes: *Twelve grantees supplied seven quarters of data within the study period of 07/1/2011 – 03/30/2013. Demographic data does not include the 270 day follow-up period of 7/1/2012 – 03/30/2013.*

In addition to demographic data, HVRP also tracks some specific indicators on participants, shown in Table 3. Not surprisingly, a large proportion of clients are veterans experiencing (99.7%) or at-risk (96%) of homelessness (in accordance with the federal program requirements) as well as clients considered chronically homeless (23%).

HVRP grantees are also required to report on a number of designations specific to veterans (based on their military service) that affect their eligibility for VA benefits and preference points for federal jobs, e.g., Campaign Badge, Disabled, Special Disabled and specific tours of duty (for more information see <http://www.dol.gov/elaws/vets/vetpref/vetspref.htm>). Attendance at Stand-Down events (grassroots, community-based intervention program designed to help homeless veterans) is also recorded.

3. Sub-populations of clients served July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012

N=1,709	Number	Percent
Homeless	1,704	99.7%
Economically disadvantaged	1,638	96%
Welfare/public assistance recipient	717	42%
Chronically homeless	388	23%
Disabled	328	19%
Campaign Badge	281	16%
Stand-Down	159	9%
Recently separated/Newly separated	151	9%
Operation Iraqi Freedom	144	8%
Operation Enduring Freedom	88	5%
Special disabled	77	5%

Source: *Common Measures Technical Performance Report (TPR) submitted by VOA HVRP grantees.*

Notes: *Twelve grantees supplied seven quarters of data within the study period of 07/1/2011 – 03/30/2013. Demographic data does not include the 270 day follow-up period of 7/1/2012 – 03/30/2013.*

HVRP performance measures

Wilder Research received HVRP reports from five Volunteers of America affiliates in eleven cities. Common Measures Technical Performance Reports (TPR) provide unduplicated counts for each of the four quarters over the program year and an additional three quarters used to measure outcomes for an additional 270 days after clients exit the program. In terms of content, the report includes information on the total number served, program outcomes (e.g., employment placement and wages), and services (the type of training provided to participants). The overall intake rate for HVRP affiliates was 57 percent, that is, of participants assessed, over half enrolled in the program.⁵

Once enrolled, a number of employment-related services are available to HVRP clients (see Table 4). Almost all (96%) of 2011 clients received job search assistance. In addition, HVRP affiliates reported that a large majority (91%) of HVRP clients received counseling or vocational guidance. More than half (53%) of HVRP clients also received more tangible employment services in the form of tools, fees, specific work clothing or boots.

⁵ Enrollment rate based on twelve TPR reports that provided seven quarters of data for program year 2011.

4. Top five services received by HVRP clients

	Percent of enrollees
Job search assistance	96%
Counseling/vocational guidance	91%
Other supportive services	63%
Job Club workshops	56%
Tools/fees/specific work clothing/boots	53%

One important component of the HVRP program, and tracked specifically in Common Measures, is the employment training received by homeless veterans in the program (see Table 5). Specifically, the VETS-DOL requirement is 80 percent of homeless veterans enrolled in the program must receive employment training. The number of participants who received employment training decreased by 12 percent (96% in 2010 to 84% in 2011). Despite the decrease, however, 2011 VOA HVRP grantees still exceeded the VETS-DOL benchmark with 84 percent of participants receiving training. Across all grantees, the five employment trainings most often received by enrollees were life skills and money management (86%)⁶, classroom training (66%), other training (27%), occupational skills (26%), and on the job training (23%).

5. Top five job skills or trainings received by HVRP clients

	Percent of enrollees
Life skills and money management	86%
Classroom training	66%
Other training	27%
Occupational skills	26%
On the job training	23%

Source: Common Measures Technical Performance Report (TPR) submitted by VOA HVRP programs.

Notes: Categories are not mutually exclusive and will therefore total more than 100%. Data includes 12 HVRP programs. The study period is 07/1/2011 – 06/30/2012.

Another critical measure of HVRP performance is the successful placement of homeless veterans in employment. On average, 63 percent of enrolled HVRP clients became employed at some point during their involvement in the program. Table 6 summarizes the Common

⁶ Data provided by program year 2011 HVRP affiliates listed a larger percentage of participants receiving life skills and money management training than receiving employment training at all (86% compared to 84%). This may indicate inconsistent data practices among HVRP affiliates.

Measures used to evaluate performance in this area — retention at 90 and 180 days, and the average wage.

6. Selected employment outcomes for HVRP clients

	Percent of 2011-12 enrollees	Percent of 2010 enrollees
Entered Employment Rate (EER) ¹	53%	54%
Employment Retention Rate (ERR) ²	52%	64%
Average hourly wage at placement	\$10.41	\$8.62
Average hourly wage at retention	\$11.21	\$9.72

Source: *Common Measures Technical Performance Report (TPR) submitted by VOA HVRP programs*

Notes: *Categories are not mutually exclusive and will therefore total more than 100%. Data includes 12 HVRP programs. The study period is 07/1/2011 – 03/30/2013, which includes program year 2011 and a 270 day follow-up period.*

¹ *Entered Employment Rate (EER) – reports the percent of participants employed in the quarter after they received services. This is a 90 day performance measure.*

² *Employment Retention Rate (ERR) – reports the percent of participants of those entering employment who remain employed the following two quarters. This is a 180 day performance measure. While affiliates provided data at the 270 day follow-up period, these data correspond to HVRP participants who exited during the 90 day follow up period; Common Measures, the reporting format required for HVRP grantees, does not allow for a 270 day performance measure.*

Just over half (53%) of participants entered employment and earned wages in the quarter after exit (EER rate). This is higher than the 2011 national average of 47 percent (United States Department of Labor, 2012). Fifty-two percent of Volunteers of America’s HVRP participants who obtained jobs reported sustained employment for two complete quarters after leaving the program. This is substantially lower than the national average Employee Retention Rate (79% in 2011). The 2011 HVRP affiliates’ average ERR decreased by 12 percent (from 64% in 2010 to 52% 2011) while the national average increased slightly (from 76% to 79%). This suggests clients are still having difficulty retaining their jobs for at least 180 days following program discharge, and Volunteers of America affiliates may need to focus more on retention-related issues in their HVRP employment programs.

HVRP clients also appear to earn substantially high average hourly wages (\$10.41 per hour at the time of job placement and \$11.21 per hour at retention). These average wages exceed most states' minimum wage requirements and compare favorably with the average hourly wage of approximately \$8.13 per hour earned by most HVRP participants nationally⁷ (United States Department of Labor, 2011).

⁷ Hourly rate calculated from annual average earnings in 2011.

Conclusions and issues to consider

Overall, the data summarized here suggest that Volunteers of America's HVRP programs are performing well and achieving most of their objectives:

- While HVRP programs primarily serve African American and Caucasian men over 45 years old, they are successfully reaching specialized populations of homeless veterans, such as those with disabilities and those who are chronically homeless.
- Affiliates' HVRP programs also appear to be making significant and consistent progress in training homeless veterans and placing them in high wage jobs.

However, there is one goal area in which affiliates' programs appear to have room for improvement.

- Only 52 percent of HVRP participants who entered employment while in the program were still employed 180 days later.

While HVRP programs outperform the national average regarding Entered Employment Rate, the Employment Retention Rate for HVRP participants is substantially lower than national trends. Moreover, the Employment Retention Rate for HVRP participants decreased by more than 10 percent between program years, whereas the national ERR average increased slightly.

Even though Volunteers of America's HVRP programs are consistently placing more veterans in jobs than other service providers, the data reported by 2010 and 2011-2012 HVRP affiliates indicate that veterans are somehow less employment-ready, or less able to access ongoing supportive services, than the veterans being placed by other programs. However, it is important to note that the data limitations inherent in this study make it difficult to draw strong conclusions about the need for such program improvements.

Wilder Research recommends the following enhancements to Volunteers of America's affiliate data practices:

- Centralized data reporting from each HVRP affiliate on a quarterly basis. HVRP grantees are required by the Department of Labor to report data on a quarterly basis; however, obtaining data reports from DOL requires an official data request. Requiring VOA HVRP affiliates to report directly to Volunteers of America (as well as to DOL) would circumvent this time-consuming process and may help to standardize data reporting practices among affiliates.

- A 270 day measure to enhance the Department of Labor 90 day and 180 day measures (EER and ERR, respectively). A 270 day measure is not required by DOL, but may be helpful for VOA program planning.

Due to VOA HVRP affiliates' below-average Employment Retention Rate and other considerations, Wilder Research recommends a qualitative follow-up study that will:

- Contextualize successes and challenges experienced by HVRP affiliates
- Measure the extent to which HVRP programs coordinate with other federally or state funded veterans' programs as well as local service providers
- Focus on innovative components of the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, such as its veterans outreach efforts

This research, drawing on data from a larger sample of HVRP programs or qualitative data collection and analysis, is necessary to form any specific recommendations for program improvement.

What is clear from the available performance data is that the vast majority of Volunteers of America's HVRP programs are having a significant impact on thousands of homeless at-risk veterans, offering them a broad range of successful housing, training, and employment services that few other federally-funded service providers can match. Based on these outcomes, it seems likely that Volunteers of America will continue to play a leading role in national initiatives to end homelessness among veterans in coming years.

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