



ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

WASHINGTON STATE VETERANS EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP (VERG)

Background

In May 2013, Governor Inslee issued his first Executive Order, 13-01 VETERANS TRANSITION SUPPORT, which states: "...effective immediately, hereby order and direct. Veterans Employee Resource Group... The Office of Financial Management, State Human Resources Division will convene a cross-agency group of veterans in state service to provide advice and assistance on veteran recruitment, retention, and development strategies. Executive cabinet agencies shall provide assistance by providing volunteers and supporting approved initiatives."

In July of 2019, Governor Inslee issues the Executive Order, 19-01 Veteran and Military Family Transition and Readiness Support. This updated EO now covers all State Employee Resource Groups to "convene and support a cross-agency employee-led resource groups or groups to promote recruitment, retention, and development of veterans and military spouses in state government. DVA will provide executive sponsorship for the group or groups. Executive cabinet agencies will support employee participation in the group or groups and approved initiatives. Agencies are encouraged to sponsor agency-level resource groups, and either include military spouses in their veteran groups or create separate military spouse groups."

The statewide VERG exists to help integrate the experience, values, and knowledge of both veterans and service members in state employment. This Employee Resource Group supports existing state employees who have served as members of the armed forces through recognition, resource identification, and mentorship. As well as focus on the following goals:

- Recruit veterans and their spouses to state service through outreach and educational activities
- Retain veterans and their spouses by providing a support structure, education, and career progression assistance
- Recognize veterans and their families by planning annual activities that honor their military and state service

2021-2022 VERG Leadership

- August 2021 Initial: Chair- Kendra Lee Harris (Parks); Co-Chair- Daniel Eckroth; Secretary- Angela Petty (DSHS)
- September 2021: Chair- Daniel Eckroth; Co-Chair- Rachel Rustad (ESD)/ Vacant; Secretary- Angela Petty

Chair and Co-Chair were appointed after only two people volunteered to take part in leadership activities. Because no major funds were ever used, a treasurer was not found nor appointed. In early September 2021, the Chair left state service to move to Tennessee to live with her Active Duty spouse. The Co-Chair took over Chair duties, and Rachel Rustad filled in for Co-Chair duties for a short time but was a non-permanent employee whose employment ended in April 2022. There were no other replacements for Rachel for the remainder of the Fiscal Year.

- August 2022: Chair- Larry Delgado (WDFW); Co-Chair- John Pestinger (OIC); Secretary- Angela Petty (DSHS)



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2021-2022 VERG Membership

- Average meeting attendees: 20-50
- Email list at GovDelivery: ~2,000
- LinkedIn Page Membership: 947 members

2021-2022 VERG Significant Accomplishments

The VERG significantly advanced the intent of *Executive Order (EO) 13-01* and the new *EO 19-01* through achievements and collaborations with its members and partners. The VERG has sponsored, hosted, and/or participated in multiple activities promoting veteran and spouse statewide workgroup partnerships, employment, development, and retention. The year started with:

- We worked to bring motivation and positivity into the VERG, combat volunteer fatigue, and focus on partnerships, and limit those items that may be causing stress points that were demotivating.
- Many agencies have started working with WorkEx and provided non-perm or internship opportunities to Spouses of veterans, to include the Temporary Staffing Solutions with DSHS and L&I internship opportunities for veterans and military spouses.
- Hosted the Veteran's Day Ceremony at the Capitol Campus which was the first in person event the VERG hosted since the pandemic began.
- Thumbprint of our work from over the years, we really started to see and incorporate into our meetings the experiences of those Veterans (and Spouses) that have gotten into State government through their networking with the VERG.
- Additional partnership has continued with Thurston County Veteran's Council on statewide recognition events such as Veteran's Day and Memorial Day events at the Capital Building
- Continued collaboration with other BRG leadership boards to talk about how to support one another, share ideas, and put together a list of needs regarding resources.

The following is a breakdown of events that we participated in for the year:

Veterans Day 11/10/2021: The VERG hosted the reading of the Governor's proclamation at the Capitol Campus's Memorial Statues and held a ceremonial wreath laying, which was highlighted by remarks from Alfie Alvarado-Ramos, the director of the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs and by Major General Bret Dougherty

VERG hosted online Job Fair May 19, 2022: With coordination from the Employment Security Department, the VERG hosted an online job fair through the Brazen website/platform. While not a resounding success at face value, it did get the VERG's name out there and there were 300 specific job seeker contacts for all of the state agencies and also specifically 45 individual contacts with the VERG information booth hosted by the Chair, Daniel Eckroth.

State Agency Job Fair June 30, 2022, hosted at the Hawk Career Center on JBLM. 15 Agencies participated along with a Q&A Panel where we had six panelists to include a veteran who was, at the time, in an internship with DSHS, one hiring manager, and members of the VERG who fill roles in HR.



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Communications and Marketing

Newsletter – Did not provide one for 2021/2022

Social Media – LinkedIn became the primary focus of social media as it is integral in the transition process for service members with several veteran influencers. It became very easy for job posting and networking, which is the primary push for our BRG..

Webpage – In addition to hosting the foundational information for the VERG, our website continues to be a work in progress.

2021-2022 VERG Financials

During the Fiscal Year, only one expenditure was made was the usage of a Podium/Microphone stand from DES, which cost approximately \$90 of the \$1,000 balance brought forward from 2020-2021.

2022-2023 VERG Next Steps

In the next season of the VERG, we recognize that there is always room to grow and improve:

- Improvement on networking
 - More efficient
 - Continues to give value
 - Has more direction
 - More inclusive (not just for job seekers)
- Opportunity for including the whole state (not just local)
 - Call in option
 - Zoom
- Develop metrics for our VERG Accomplishments/Membership/Partners
- Continue and get better at supporting our internal Veteran and Spouse employees
 - Increase engagement
 - Provide better resources
 - Provide better communication
 - Value added, they are not just coming to bring in more visitors; how can we provide resources that they really need?
 - Active membership program?
- We start off strong, but participation starts to dwindle throughout the year
 - Do we set expectations?
 - Take a look at other BRGs to see what they do
- Overwhelming for first time attendees
 - How do we bridge the gap?
 - Welcome letter/email/survey after their first attendance to show we recognize they came?
 - Opportunity to engage more with visitors
- A need to get back to basics
 - More focus on our mission and vision
 - Power in simplicity
 - Bring back speakers



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- More partnership with agency ERGs
 - Give them a platform
 - Opportunity to provide support
- Give our members more of a voice without the pressure/stress
- Highlight the needs of the Spouse Community
- Do a better job with Agendas
 - Put them out in a timely manner (two weeks prior)
 - Follow up with meeting minutes and more opportunities for feedback
- Focus on Veteran and Spouse Retention
 - Spouse sessions and Outreach
 - Information sessions
 - What are we doing to find out what they want?
- Reach out and create more partnerships and highlight our resources
 - Provide more information via our website
 - Highlight resources on social media
 - Reach out to populations such as Stone Education Center
- Better use of our time
 - Recognizing these are volunteer efforts and it takes work to put together continuous streams of content
 - Utilize the membership's strengths, not put it all on one person, or all on the leads.
 - Not work in the silos of our subcommittees and roles outside of our work