

**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)  
Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials  
Recommendations from Meetings Held  
June 15-16, 2022, and November 2-3, 2022**

The VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials (Committee or ACCM) supports VA's mission to increase access to benefits and services for Veterans. In the meetings held on June 15-16, 2022, and November 2-3, 2022, the Committee voted unanimously to submit the following recommendations to the VA Secretary and the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs.

**Recommendation 1: NCA should continue to conduct interviews with tribal leaders and the Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs to better determine the needs of VA grant funded tribal cemeteries.**

**VA Response:** Concur.

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) will continue to conduct interviews with tribal leaders who have grant-funded cemeteries on their tribal lands to better determine the needs of VA grant-funded tribal cemeteries. In May 2022, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (USMA) Matthew Quinn and NCA leadership participated in a video conference meeting with the Apsaalooke (Crow) Tribal Cemetery leadership of Montana. In October 2022, the USMA and members of his staff participated in a video conference meeting with the Pascua Yaqui tribal leadership of Arizona to discuss the Monte Calvario Cemetery in Tucson. The USMA continued this series of conferences in 2023 by participating in a video conference meeting with the newly-elected Tribal Chairman of the Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux in January. During these interviews, NCA focuses on whether tribes can observe their traditional practices during committal services while maintaining gravesite and cemetery appearance. NCA specifically asks if any NCA requirement, real or perceived, could be adjusted to show more cultural sensitivity that may lead to increased utilization by tribal membership. NCA participated in the first Department-level briefing to the new Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs. Once NCA has completed interviews with all the leaders of the grant-funded cemeteries, we will engage with ACCM to determine whether and how to further engage with the Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs.

**Recommendation 2: NCA should continue to provide support to tribal cemeteries with a focus on acknowledgment of traditional practices and cultural sensitivity to increase utilization by the tribal membership.**

**VA Response:** Concur.

NCA will continue to conduct interviews with tribal leaders to better determine the needs of VA grant-funded tribal cemeteries. During these interviews, NCA focuses on whether tribes can observe their traditional practices during committal services while maintaining gravesite and cemetery appearance. NCA specifically asks if any NCA requirement, real

or perceived, could be adjusted to show more cultural sensitivity that may lead to increased utilization by tribal membership. ACCM is now assisting NCA with this endeavor.

**Recommendation 3: NCA should develop customizable Funeral Director Continuing Education Training Program tools to be provided to National, State and Tribal Veterans Cemeteries, to use as they are able. The training program tools are intended to increase awareness, enhance the knowledge of our funeral service professionals, and encourage funeral homes to better support American Veterans and their families.**

**VA Response:** Concur in principle.

NCA agrees that we should provide greater outreach to our stakeholders, but recognizes that customizing tools will possibly be resource-intensive. NCA is currently developing an outreach and communications plan this year to ensure that stakeholders are more informed and will investigate the possibility of providing formal training to specific groups.

**Recommendation 4: NCA continue to expand on the success of the Veterans Legacy Program (VLP) to increase the number of grantees and enhance the awareness of the legacy of our Veterans.**

**VA Response:** Concur.

NCA will continue to promote awareness of the Veterans Legacy Grant Program via social media and other platforms.

The Federal Register notice inviting grant applications for this year was published on March 30, 2023. A corresponding notice was published on Grants.gov that same day. Below are links to the respective notifications:

- Grants.gov - [Search Grants | GRANTS.GOV](#)
- Federal Register - [Federal Register: Veterans Legacy Grants Program](#)

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Grant applications were due no later than May 1, 2023. VA will review the applications according to the requirements of our program and anticipates a decision and award of grants by June 15, 2023.

**Recommendation 5: NCA continue to expand on the success of the Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) to include all eligible deceased Veterans.**

**VA Response:** Concur.

NCA will continue to make progress through Fiscal Year 2026 to include other Government-run cemetery systems including Arlington National Cemetery and 27 other

Department of Defense cemeteries, the remaining 12 National Park Service cemeteries and cemeteries managed by the American Battle Monuments Commission. Additionally, NCA will add Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) pages for post-1993 Veterans interred in private cemeteries who have had VA memorial products ordered from VA. These efforts will add millions more Veteran pages to VLM. In a parallel effort, NCA will also explore a hybrid online workflow approach for survivors and others to submit other Veterans to NCA for review and approval for VLM page creation who were laid to rest in private cemeteries pre-1993 and for various other circumstances (burial at sea, scattered cremains, interred remains at private residences, etc.).

**Recommendation 6: NCA should provide funeral homes, and other stakeholders, who participate in the Unclaimed Veterans Remains Program a Certificate for Exceptional Service to Unclaimed/Unassisted Veterans.**

**VA Response:** Concur in principle.

NCA appreciates the Committee's support for funeral homes and funeral directors who assume responsibility for the final arrangements of unclaimed Veterans. As one of the three VA Administrations with responsibility for ensuring the dignified final disposition of unclaimed Veteran remains, NCA will refer this recommendation to the VA Integrated Project Team (IPT) for Unclaimed Veterans' Remains. As the Committee is aware, the first recommendation in the VA Office of Inspector General's Report, *Improvements Needed to Ensure Final Disposition of Unclaimed Veterans' Remains* was for VA to designate a senior accountable official or program office for the full scope of benefits and services provided on behalf of unclaimed Veterans. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) will lead the enterprise-wide program and has named Kevin Friel, Deputy Director, Pension and Fiduciary Service, as the senior accountable official. This new program will be the most appropriate VA office to respond to this recommendation once it is operational.

**Recommendation 7: NCA should explore ways to partner with Veterans Service Officers in the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) in outreach efforts to increase awareness about burial benefits and NCA offerings on a local level.**

**VA Response:** Concur in principle.

NCA concurs with this recommendation and plans to collaborate with VBA on several intra-agency work groups and initiatives and will continue to use these forums to coordinate additional opportunities for sharing NCA information to improve access and awareness of burial benefits. NCA can provide the Committee with an update on these efforts at its next meeting.

VBA concurs in principle that NCA should explore ways to partner with the Veteran Service Organization (VSO) community. Further, VBA recommends the recommendation be clarified. VBA does not employ Veterans Service Officers as this is

the title given to those who work within VSOs such as Disabled American Veterans or the American Legion.

VBA's Outreach, Transition and Economic Development (OTED) will continue to work with NCA and VSOs to ensure information about burial benefits is disseminated to VA's external partners. Accordingly, VBA seeks opportunities to collaborate on outreach events, and OTED has invited NCA to participate in virtual outreach symposiums that provide information to the public, Veterans, caregivers and surviving spouses.

**Recommendation 8: NCA should invite Funeral Directors to learn about Veteran burial benefits by establishing a Funeral Director Continuing Education (CE) program by which Cemetery Directors, Veterans Service Officers and other presenters can deliver training and materials to local Funeral Directors.**

**VA Response:** Concur.

NCA concurs that we should provide greater outreach to our stakeholders. NCA is developing an outreach and communications plan this year to ensure that stakeholders are more informed and will investigate the possibility of providing formal training to specific groups.

**Recommendation 9: VA should create promotional materials to help raise awareness about Veteran burial benefits provided by VBA and NCA for use at Funeral Homes. For example, NCA could develop a poster that states, "Did you know you and your spouse may be eligible to be buried in a Veterans Cemetery? Ask us how!"**

**VA Response:** Concur.

NCA concurs that we should provide greater outreach to our stakeholders. NCA is developing an outreach and communications plan this year to ensure that stakeholders are more informed and will investigate the possibility of providing formal training to specific groups.

**Recommendation 10: The Veterans Benefits Administration's Indigent Veterans Unclaimed Remains Coordinators (IVURCs) should proactively increase outreach, education, and contact on an annual basis to the County Coroners and Medical Examiner Office and their Indigent Remains Program Coordinators, as well as the County Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) to help raise awareness about unclaimed and indigent Veteran burial benefits.**

**VA Response:** Concur in principle.

VBA's Indigent Veterans Unclaimed Remains Coordinators (IVURC) already conduct quarterly outreach that is monitored by VBA Central Office. The goal of the outreach is to ensure Indigent Veterans and Unclaimed Remains custodians (medical

examiners/coroners, funeral home directors, etc.) can obtain verification of a Veteran's military status and receive information about available burial benefits. VBA acknowledges its role in providing assistance to county coroner and medical examiner offices in verifying that an unclaimed individual's remains meet Veteran status (which NCA also performs) so burial arrangements can be made. NCA as well as state and tribal cemeteries have the expertise and scheduling capability to then coordinate final disposition.

Further, the three VA administrations (VBA, Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and NCA) have been participating in a year-long IPT to determine and implement better ways to educate and inform these offices on what to do when they may have unclaimed remains, which will aid in ensuring that Veteran's remains are buried in a dignified manner.

**Recommendation 11: The Veterans Benefits Administration's Office of Outreach Transition and Economic Development should provide a briefing to the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials (ACCM) on the progress of the Indigent Veteran and Unclaimed Remains Coordinators (IVURCs) program during a Fall 2023 ACCM Business Meeting.**

**VA Response:** Concur.

VBA will provide an update on the progress of the IVURC program during the Fall 2023 ACCM Business Meeting.

**Recommendation 12: The Veterans Benefits Administration and National Cemetery Administration should work with County Medical Examiner Office Indigent Burial Program Coordinators, County Coroners, and Funeral Directors to develop a "How To" workflow to help coordinate the final disposition of unclaimed Veteran remains (e.g., poster, flyer, videos).**

**VA Response:** Concur in principle.

NCA will refer this recommendation to the IPT for Unclaimed Veteran Remains. As part of the work already completed by the IPT, VBA, VHA and NCA-examined internal processes which resulted in updates to VBA's adjudication and outreach manuals. This IPT has already completed a substantial amount of development in assigning responsibility for the various tasks necessary for a successful program. VBA has taken responsibility for oversight of the full scope of VA benefits and services provided on behalf of unclaimed Veterans and will be the most appropriate entity within VA to lead a coordinated effort. NCA will invite leadership from VBA's new enterprise program to the June meeting of the ACCM to discuss improvements that have been made and are planned.

**Recommendation 13: NCA should reach out and partner with the National Associations of Financial Advisors, Certified Public Accountants, estate**

planners, probate and trust attorneys, and hospice and palliative healthcare professionals, whose agents routinely have face-to-face meetings with Veterans and spouses, to increase awareness of, improve education about, and promote utilization of VA burial benefits using the NCA website link video:

[https://www.cem.va.gov/burial\\_benefits/index.asp](https://www.cem.va.gov/burial_benefits/index.asp).

**VA Response:** Concur in principle.

NCA concurs that we should enhance outreach to our stakeholders. NCA is developing an outreach and communications plan this year to ensure that stakeholders are more informed and will investigate the possibility of providing formal training to specific groups. NCA has partnered internally with VHA and VBA to promote benefits and services across our Administrations to each other's stakeholder groups. NCA welcomes additional opportunities to partner with financial advisors, estate planners and other related industries to raise awareness of VA burial benefits as opportunities and current resources permit.

**Recommendation 14:** NCA should consider developing detailed surveys for state and tribal cemetery leadership covering all aspects of burial and memorial operations to identify support gaps and establish baseline data. The results of these surveys will assist NCA in identifying areas in greatest need of support.

**VA Response:** Concur in principle.

NCA is always interested in learning about the needs of state and tribal Veteran cemeteries. We have worked hard to improve communications with our state and tribal partners, and we believe we provide states and tribes sufficient opportunities to hear about program changes and initiatives and to express concerns to NCA. This recommendation presents an intriguing way of collecting more information. As agreed with the Advisory Committee at its administrative meeting on January 19, 2023, NCA will work with the Grant-Funded Cemeteries Subcommittee to develop and refine the survey methodology and prioritize questions to be asked to obtain actionable information. We recognize that members of the Committee have extensive experience dealing with and operating these cemeteries, and we believe the Committee itself may be better positioned to conduct these surveys, both to take advantage of the experience of the Committee leaders and to obtain open and candid responses from State and tribal participants.

**Recommendation 15:** NCA should create remote (web-based) operational training for Veteran cemetery staff; producing and providing these resources, using virtual technologies, would ensure Veteran Cemeteries are well-postured for optimal success.

**VA Response:** Concur.

NCA currently has several training resources available to employees, and where appropriate and within NCA's statutory authority, to Veterans Cemetery Grants Program participants. NCA's Cemetery Caretaker and Cemetery Representative onboarding courses are currently available to state and tribal cemeteries via SharePoint. NCA is currently in the process of moving these courses to the VA Talent Management System for better visibility, accessibility and tracking of users.

**Recommendation 16: NCA should consider convening state and tribal focus groups with participants volunteering time to formulate strategies to ensure parity and consistent distribution of benefits. Focus groups would also serve to collectively communicate issues or requests for additional support.**

**VA Response:** Concur in principle.

NCA is always interested in learning about the needs of state and tribal Veteran cemeteries. We have worked hard to improve communications with our state and tribal partners, and we believe we provide states and tribes sufficient opportunities to hear about program changes and initiatives and to express concerns to NCA. As agreed with ACCM at its administrative meeting on January 19, 2023, NCA will work with the Committee's Grant-Funded Cemeteries Subcommittee to develop and refine the focus group methodology and prioritize questions to be asked to obtain actionable information. We recognize that members of the Committee have extensive experience dealing with and operating these cemeteries, and we believe the Committee itself may be better positioned to conduct the focus group, both to take advantage of the experience of the Committee leaders and to obtain open and candid responses from state and tribal participants.

**Department of Veterans Affairs  
June 2023**