

Professional Veterans Advocates of North Dakota
Discussion Paper
Accreditation of County Veterans Service Officers
in the State of North Dakota

Prepared: May 2012

What is accreditation?

Accreditation is formal recognition by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that a person who assists veterans with benefit claims has been properly trained in the applicable laws, rules, and procedures.

Why is accreditation important?

Veterans deserve the best possible representation when they seek benefits from the VA. Highly-trained advocates are invaluable to the process.

How does a veterans advocate become accredited by the VA?

There are several organizations that train and employ advocates. For our purpose, we'll focus on County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs). A CVSO may be accredited through a sponsoring veterans service organization or the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO). These entities provide training and testing that meet VA standards for accreditation.

What is the role of the CVSO?

The CVSO counsels and assists veterans with their benefit claims to the VA, the state, and other agencies. The CVSO is appointed by elected county commissioners to be an independent advocate for veterans, not encumbered by supervision from federal or state officials. It is a system that has worked well for more than 80 years.

What is NACVSO?

It is a nonprofit association of CVSOs and advocates from across the U.S. The organization provides training that is geared to the work performed by CVSOs at a local level. Accreditation training is conducted by highly experienced and professional CVSOs from throughout the nation.

What kind of training is offered by other organizations?

Other organizations provide excellent training for their employees and representatives. However, their training is focused on the duties and policies/procedures within their respective organizations.

Why is NACVSO accreditation of CVSOs required by state law?

Legislators saw a need to establish a minimum training standard to ensure every CVSO has the knowledge, skill, and ability to properly assist veterans. Having a standard written into law ensures any attempts to change the law will require thoughtful deliberation and a majority vote by those who are elected to represent the best interests of the people of North Dakota. Credentialing is done in a similar manner for several other professions.

Why should the state continue to require NACVSO accreditation?

It is a clear, consistent, attainable national standard for CVSOs. It ensures veterans receive proper service no matter where they live. Most CVSOs in North Dakota have already successfully completed NACVSO accreditation training. The state has taken a huge step forward in the area of veterans service and is a leader in the nation.

What other training is provided by NACVSO?

In addition to accreditation training, NACVSO conducts ongoing proficiency training and an advanced-level class.

What are the other benefits of NACVSO accreditation?

NACVSO has agreements with several veterans service organizations to recognize the NACVSO training standard and allow cross-accreditation without a need for further training. This is important because a veteran selects a veterans service organization as a representative during the claim process. The CVSO partners with the organization in representing the claim. If the CVSO is accredited with the partnering organization, the CVSO has access to VA computer systems and VA employees, and can do a better job of serving the client. NACVSO also provides a nationwide peer network of highly experienced experts that is available to all members.

Why do veterans select an organization to provide representation?

Veterans service organizations are chartered by the U.S. Congress. Their legal status allows them to directly represent veterans before the VA. NACVSO may also represent claimants before the VA.

Do service organizations allow cross-accreditation other than through NACVSO?

No.

What are the requirements for NACVSO accreditation?

CVSOs must complete one week of training and pass an exam at the end of the course. They also apply for accreditation through NACVSO to the VA. NACVSO membership is required. The dues are \$30 per year. After initial accreditation, CVSOs must complete a minimum of 16 hours per year of continuing education units (CEUs). CEU training may be conducted by a number of recognized agencies or organizations, including the state.

Do other states require NACVSO accreditation of CVSOs?

Yes. Two other states have thus far adopted the same standard as North Dakota. More states are considering similar legislation.

Does the current law prohibit or limit additional training for CVSOs?

No. The state can and should provide optional training over and above the minimum legal requirement to further enhance the effectiveness of CVSOs.

Are counties able to receive additional assistance to train and mentor their CVSOs?

Yes. The state department of veterans affairs will provide assistance to any county upon request.

Does NACVSO control the credentialing requirements for CVSOs in North Dakota?

No. The state legislature sets the requirements. NACVSO provides the training to meet the requirements.

Does the current law cause delays in processing veterans disability claims?

No. Well-trained and accredited CVSOs expedite the claims process.

Does the current law limit accreditation to only NACVSO?

No. NACVSO accreditation is the minimum requirement, and continuing education is required to maintain their status. CVSOs may also be accredited with multiple service organizations, and are encouraged to do so.