



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Joya Hayes, Human Resources and Civil Service Director *JA*
Carol Johnson, Director, Office of Civil Rights *CJ*

THROUGH: Veronica Briseño, Assistant City Manager

DATE: July 1, 2022

SUBJECT: **Establishment of a Veterans and Military Affairs Office (Resolution No. 20211209-057)**

This memorandum provides a response to [Resolution No. 20211209-057](#), which asked the City Manager to explore the establishment of a Veterans and Military Affairs Office. As expressed in December 2021, the Manager had previously completed the work requested and had provided options for Council to move forward with creation of a Veterans Resource Center (VRC). Specifically, the Human Resources Department (HRD) had taken the following actions since 2015:

- March 18, 2015, the Commission on Veteran Affairs approved [Recommendation Number: 20150318-B004](#) which encouraged City Council to allocate funds for a VRC. This recommendation was not included in the adopted Fiscal Year 2016 annual budget.
- April 19, 2017, the Commission on Veterans Affairs approved [Budget Resolution Recommendation Number: 20170419-4.d](#) recommending the allocation of \$1.3 million for the formation and implementation of a VRC, Veterans plaza and staffing. This recommendation was not included in the adopted Fiscal Year 2018 annual budget.
- June 22, 2017, City Council passed [Resolution No. 20170622-035](#) directing the City Manager to provide a business plan related to a Veteran Resource Center, to include a needs assessment and recommendations on how to approach gaps.
- December 15, 2017, HRD provided an [update memo](#) to Council that detailed:
 - The vendors interested in participating in a VRC (12 out of 48 surveyed),
 - Cost estimate for rent, technology, and furniture to set up a VRC, and
 - Recommendation to partner with a consultant for the needs assessment.
- May 16, 2018, HRD [presented](#) options to the Commission on Veteran Affairs to move forward with a VRC.

- June 3, 2018, the Commission on Veteran Affairs approved Budget Resolution Recommendation 20180603-3.a recommending \$850,000 per year for five years to fund a VRC. This recommendation was not included in the adopted Fiscal Year 2019 annual budget.
- October 2, 2018, Item B002, HRD [presented](#) at a Council Work Session:
 - Recommended contracting with consultant for the needs assessment, and
 - HRD agreed to absorb the cost of the needs assessment in the Fiscal Year 2019 budget.
- January 31, 2019, HRD secured a contract with Combined Arms for a community needs assessment after completing a procurement process.
- August 20, 2019, Item B001, HRD with Combined Arms, [presented](#) recommendations at a Council Work Session.
- October 21, 2019, HRD provided a memo to Council with the needs assessment report and policy recommendations which concluded that at least one VRC is needed/desired in the five-county region and that a public-private partnership between the City and a non-profit organization be developed for the management and programming of the space. Council took no action.
- January 15, 2020, the Commission on Veterans Affairs approved [Recommendation Number: 20200115-B003](#) recommending the creation of a City Department of Veterans and Military Affairs.

The Human Resources Department, as the responsible department for internal veterans-related services, provides programs, services and initiatives that support veterans in the community. Prior to 2021, HRD was also responsible for externally focused veterans programming. The following highlight those efforts:

External Programs Managed by HRD from 2017 through 2021

- Commission on Veteran Affairs – Acted as a liaison between the Commission and the City. The Office handled all administrative functions for the Commission and ensures compliance with the Texas Open Meetings Act.
- Dress for Success – Supported women veterans returning to the workforce with training, attire, and support for interviews.
- Veteran Emergency Response Team (VERT) – Coordinated and collaborated with Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) during emergencies within the city of Austin.
- AT&T Vets – Coordinated furniture donations between Donors, Veteran Affairs, and AT&T Vets, who are volunteers to pick-up and drop-off donations to no longer homeless veterans in the No Longer Homeless Veterans Furniture Program.
- Veteran County Service Offices – Worked and collaborated with Veteran County Service Officers for referrals, events in the veteran community, and assistance with veteran benefits in the counties surrounding Austin.
- DAV, American Legion, Military Order of the Purple Heart, VFW, NABVETS – Provided resources, collaborated on events, job fairs, and veteran benefit referrals for veterans.
- Community Events – Supported the Federal, State, County, and local veteran

organizations, by providing resources, outreach, and partnerships to assist with events related to veteran services.

Diversity Veterans Programs: New Internal City Employee Initiatives and Ongoing Programs

- Recruiting Job Fairs & Resource Events (implementation 2022) – HRD Diversity team attends and supports all local and surrounding military job fairs to increase the recruitment and diversity of our service members transitioning or looking for employment. HRD Diversity team supports, represents, and provides veteran candidates with resources such as resumes workshops, mock interviews, and career opportunity-related resources available at HRD.
- City Employee Veteran Support training (implementation 2022) – Internal department support and collaboration to provide veteran-related transitional training offerings, internal veteran employee resources, and provide veteran benefit referrals for City veteran employee seeking assistance in HR-related services.
- Veteran HR Manager/Staff training (implementation 2022) – HRD veterans consultant will provide year-round, ongoing training such as Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) training and other veteran-related topics HR managers need assistance within their own business processes.
- Fort Hood Job Career Skills Program – Veteran Internship Program that includes collaboration and coordination with Fort Hood and other external partners to continue to grow and develop a program by providing outreach across City departments through a variety of communication efforts. Program objective is to assist veterans returning to the workforce and promote temporary job assignments with a high probability of employment with the City.
- Veteran Preference in Hiring – Within the candidate pool, 20% of the top qualified veterans shall be granted an interview to provide an opportunity for possible employment and exposure to being interviewed. HRD consultant oversees the business process to ensure best practices within City Departments.
- Veteran Luncheon – On November 11th (Veterans Day), the City of Austin hosts its internal veteran’s appreciation luncheon for all employees and retirees from the City to come together for lunch with a full program, guest speaker, and a resource fair.
- Employee Engagement/Appreciation Events – On June 16, the HRD Diversity team will also host an appreciation luncheon for our women veterans to network, along with providing valuable leadership and inviting key departments to speak on resources available for our veteran employees.

City Department Collaborative Partnerships

- Service-Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (SDVBE) (SMBR) – The City of Austin Purchasing Department provides a 3% preference point on RFP (Request for Proposal) solicitations to Service-connected Disabled Veterans who are primary contractors. The city veteran’s program has been working on creating an SDVBE for more than 10 years until it came into fruition in the Purchasing Office but hopes to have the SMBR office also involved in considering service-connected disabled veterans for selection as there was a disparity link between them.

- Economic Development Veteran Business Loan initiative (EDD) – In partnership with EDD, a veteran business loan initiative was created for veterans who would like to own and start a business. We bring awareness of this program and work with other entrepreneur entities to have this resource available and considered.

Since assuming responsibility for external-focused programming efforts in 2021, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) works in coordination and collaboration with the Veteran County Service Offices as needed. The OCR also provides staff and executive liaison support to the Commission on Veteran's Affairs to assist the public with participating in Austin's governmental processes and help to shape and influence public policy from diverse viewpoints. The OCR acts as a liaison between the Commission and the City.

Given the actions highlighted above and recognition that OCR currently provides support to the Commission on Veterans Affairs, staff recommends that the City Council provide direction during the Fiscal Year 2023 budget process to provide ongoing General Fund support for the addition of one Program Manager II position within OCR at a cost of approximately \$127,000 annually. Without this funding direction, staff will be unable to create this position. This position would collaborate with internal and external partners, local, state, and federal agencies to inform policy, develop programming and facilitate stakeholder engagement and Council policy direction regarding the veteran community.

If you have additional questions, please contact Joya Hayes at joya.hayes@austintexas.gov or Carol Johnson at carol.johnson@austintexas.gov.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Anne Morgan, Acting City Manager