

# **Executive Summary**

## **WORKING GROUP II**

APRIL 12, 2019



### **WORKING GROUP II COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Bud Alley, Frank Barry, Ken Holybee, Jack Mattingly, Lynn McMillen, Francisco Muñiz III (Chair),  
Felix Peterson, Jr. (Co-Chair), Dominic Yezzo and AVVA Advisor Nancy Rekowski

**Mentor:** Rev. Bob Lewis

Everyone is breathlessly waiting for the Working Group II report and there have been signs that it might, maybe, possibly, definitely, or not, be released today. This is the unredacted version of our report.

Vietnam Veterans of America has been dealing with the question of the future of VVA since April 23, 2005 when a motion #32 was approved to appoint an Ad Hoc committee to, by President Tom Corey, to investigate the Congressional, legal, and internal issues to be dealt with to expand the membership VVA to include veterans of other eras. This was presented to the delegates at the 2005 National Convention with a resounding negative feedback by the delegates.

Another VVA Future Task Force Report was issued in April of 2011 by Jack Devine, chair of VVA Future Task Force. According to the report, the results obtained are similar to what they had heard at conventions and at conferences when it comes to planning for the reconfiguration, the transfer, or the demise of VVA.

In 2014, President John Rowan, established a Strategic Working Group in an effort to again to identify areas that need attention or require increased information in order to evaluate the direction of any future plans VVA would need to make as they move toward that time when decisions on our final days would be necessary. This group was not established to singularly determine the ultimate direction of VVA. Its purpose is to identify items or areas where VVA must be knowledgeable and prepared to enter into informed discussions in order to ultimately determine the direction of VVA

A final report was given on October 15, 2016 to the National Board of Directors with the following statement: It was to be a repository and data source of collective thoughts, information and considerations to provide input to the decision making of VVA Board of Directors with regards to the future of VVA.

Again in October of 2016, VVA National Board of Directors passed the following **Motion 19** To establish two panels: Panel A) will formulate a strategic plan to “Transition” at a time certain in the future to be determined by the working group and communicated to the general membership for approval at a convention; and Panel B) will determine the feasibility of forming, chartering, funding and/or empowerment of a new veterans’ organization to perpetuate our legacy and assure the tomorrow of all veterans which will be communicated to the general membership for approval at a convention. The proposed membership on these panels will be presented to the National Board of Directors in January 2017 for approval and the chairs will be determined by their respective panels.

In January 2017, President Rowan to appointed the following individuals to the Working Group II were: Robert Barquit, Frank Barry, Jack Mattingly, Jack McManus, Lynn McMillen, Felix Peterson, Jr., Frank Plichta, and Dominic Yezzo as members of Panel B, and Ken Holybee and Keith King as alternate members and appointed Francisco Muñiz III as chair of the Working Group II committee.

Unfortunately, before the committee met for training, three of our committee members had to resign due to illness or family matters to attend. Just last week we lost another committee member due to illness and other commitments. We currently have six members and one AVVA advisor. We have had our disagreements, ups and downs but we continue to work as a TEAM towards our goals.

We had Rev. Bob Lewis as our mentor/instructor for our training sessions and the following Executive Officers were assigned to the Working Group II committee: President John Rowan for Historical information, Vice President Marsha Four for Logistics, Secretary bill Meeks for Communication and Treasurer Wayne Reynolds for Financial and Contractual information.

Both Working Groups were to work independently of each other and we were instructed not to speak to anyone about the work we were doing until we were ready to present the findings to the National Board of Directors and to the membership at the Leadership and Education Conference.

In April 2017 Motion 4 was passed to change the names from Panel A to Working Group I and Panel B to Working Group II.

Working Group II was mandated to **determine the feasibility of forming, chartering, funding and/or empowerment of a new veterans' organization to perpetuate our legacy and assure the tomorrow of all veterans which will be communicated to the general membership for approval at a convention**

The Committee members took the following Action Items: **lead, forming, chartering, funding and/or empowerment of a new veterans' organization to perpetuate our legacy and assure the tomorrow of all veterans** and expanded their definition to address our goals.

We had presentations to the National Board, at the Palm Springs Leadership and Educational Conference as well as a special E-mail address in order to receive input from every members of VVA. Yet, we did not receive positive input from the membership or leadership across the board. The majority of the membership wants VVA to completely close down and not transfer any of our knowledge, office space, staff, funds, etc. to a new organization.

The membership wants Vietnam Veterans of America to CEASE TO EXIST!

At our presentation at the Leadership & Education Conference, there was a ruckus about the Action Item: FORMATION. So we went back and redid the definition of Formation which will be updated in the upcoming manual. It seems that many members did not attend that meeting because we have gotten a few requests for the formation of a foundation to keep our VVA legacy to be memorialized so that others could follow our lead.

The membership thinks that we are morphing into a new organization and they do not want that transition.

They are not even thinking or giving input about our Founding Principle *–Never Again Will One Generation of Veterans Be Abandon.*

They are doing what the traditional veterans service organizations did to us: **abandon them.**

VVA wants is to transfer our knowledge and expertise to some NEW veteran organization to continue our method of dealing with the government and the VA system. We have been very successful in this field especially because we are not afraid to bring lawsuits against our adversaries.

We are in the process of updating and finalizing our presentation, to bring forward guidelines in developing a Veterans Service organization. This will be produced and presented to the National Executive Officers and the other Board members at the convention.

Most of the E-mails were to instruct us how to divide the existent VVA funds to the State Councils and Chapters depending on their membership numbers.

We heard from individuals requesting resolutions that any funds be divided among the remaining traditional veterans service organizations according to their Vietnam veteran's membership in their organization.

Each committee member reached out within their town, cities, and state to qualified new leaders but they were not interested in forming a membership organization. They were satisfied with their 501 (C) 3 foundation doing what they enjoyed, such as giving classes in comedy workshops, training veterans musical instruments, joining forces in fundraising running events or going to disaster areas and help build the communities affected by storms, hurricanes, floods or major disaster.

Working Group II did not have the funds or the time to do a focus group with known new young leaderships within our communities.

We were fortunate to have a group, Students of America, to come and present their organization to us because their headquarters are located within the DC area and it was at no cost to the organization. They presented their views and will present it to the National Board members at the April Board of Directors meeting.

At our last Working Group II meeting in April, we had the opportunity to hear from two Gulf War veterans that are still involved with the National Gulf War Resource Center (NGWRC). They also attended our National Board of Directors meeting.

The committee drafted two Resolutions to be presented at the Convention in July at our 19<sup>th</sup> Biennial National Convention in Spokane, WA.

Working Group II has only made one contact with Student of America organization and with leadership of the National Gulf War Resource Center and we have not endorsed any organization to take over VVA.

That will be done by the National Board of Directors and presented to the delegates at the appropriate time at a Convention.

You can contact Working Group II at: [VVA\\_Forward@vva.org](mailto:VVA_Forward@vva.org)

In closing, Working Group II was not instructed to name or establish a new veteran service organization but to see if it was feasible to start a new organization with input from new leaders within our communities.

The National Board need to find a new leadership that has the knowledge of the usage of social media to reach out to these veterans within our communities. We accomplished our goals and the committee members thanks the National Board for giving us this opportunity to address this major concern.

**The following is some of the feedback that Working Group II received:**

Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are invited to attend VVA meeting but they are not interested and do not attend. Forums are held to inform the new veterans about legislative issues as well as to what benefits they are entitled to receive but they do not attend these forums. They claim that they can't relate to us – due to age differences. They enjoyed their own company.

I think membership criteria for VVA should stay the way it is, that is, limited to only Vietnam and Vietnam era veterans.

I think membership to VVA should be expanded to include veterans from other time periods.

They enjoy themselves because they're all about the same age; they have their own "network".

Times have changed all of us and the time may be right to look at things from a new perspective. What might not have been considered even 10 or 20 years ago...maybe is worth discussing today and as we move forward.

That bottom line, however, is really simple - a recommendation for the name of the successor organization. The name recommended is "Veterans of America's Wars".

Are we really sure we want to go out of business in 2029? As precedent, the great Civil War veterans' organization, the Grand Army of the Republic, held its last national convention in 1949. We have a larger membership eligibility group and have longer life expectancies

Why start a new successor organization? We tried Veterans of Modern Warfare already, and that didn't work. Until we have a government that provides the country with a much bigger war than the ones produced in the last 30 years, the likely pool of veterans interested in an organization is going to seriously diminish, making a new veterans organization much less likely to succeed. This leaves two other options:

- I) merge with an existing veterans' organization, most likely either American Legion or Amvets, based on compatibility of eligibility rules, or
- II) donate the assets to a foundation, existing or new, which is designed to promote medical research on veterans' illnesses or historical legacy of the Vietnam War or some other form of veterans' assistance

...everyone wants us to cease after the "last man dies" Other organizations need to form from our Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraq members to carry on the mission of never leaving anyone behind and we want to work helping with that task---but not by changing/merging into something else.

While we want veterans fighting for benefits after we are gone, we do not want our organization merging into an organization with other veterans of different time periods. Think you will be hearing from many more who feel the way I do.

Over my dead body – some members will leave the organization if there is a name change.

Let them start their own organization.

## Trust the Process

To fully understand what Working Group II has been doing over the past two years, it is necessary to understand the process laid out by our mentor, Reverend Lewis.

To begin the process, the **N.A.T.O. model** was used- a quick, easy, yet simple method for organizing our meetings.

N=Nature-why we are meeting and the intent which was to make decisions, share information, to solve problems, to brainstorm ideas.

A=Agenda-what will be done, who will do it, when will it be done, how & when will we stop.

T=Time-establish the amount of time that will be devoted to the meetings.

O=Outcomes-knowing our roles, the rules, and responsibilities leading to a documented action plan. It identifies clear outcomes for the meetings, that are measurable so we know that the outcomes have been achieved.

Why we used working groups.

- Creates synergy
- Provides different perspectives in solving complex issues
- Improves attitudes, fosters cooperation, and organizational “buy in”
- Increases participation in implementation

Our marching orders were the **OMR Model**:

O=Outcome: defined in detail by the plan.

M=Method-defined by the working group-how will we do this

R=Resources-what we needed and used.

Our strategic plan used the **Process/Content Model**.

**Process** (leadership) how we did it and a guide for the plan (Rev. Lewis)

**Content** (membership) what was to be done, who will do it, when it will be done, and how and when we will stop.

**The implementation steps were as followed:**

Step 1: activate organizational awareness (for the board and membership)

Step 2: environmental transformation (change to transition)

Step 3: macro/micro process defined

Step 4: identify key organization variables

Step 5: measure and track progress (against timeline of the 2019 convention)

Step 6: test action items

Step 7: identify success and adjourn.

Planning for data collection: used in designing survey.

What problems or operations are to be studied?

What is the data to be used for?  
How much data is needed?  
How long will data be collected?  
Can existing data be used?  
What inferences can be drawn from the collected data?  
What action should be taken as a result?  
Is the method of data collection as quick and non disruptive as possible given our needs?

**These are the steps we used in collecting the data.**

Step 1-defined issues related to data size.

Step 2-data sheet specifics: who is to do the collecting, how often should data be collected, what will be the manner of data collection, how will it be recorded so that it can be efficiently analyzed, what medium (computer or manual)?

Step 3-test the collection method and refine the steps.

Step 4-work on summarization during data collection.

Step 5-generate and collect on the data to be analyzed.

As a working group we analyzed the data collected.

Working Group II was presented with the 6 best planning models and decided on **Model One- Conventional Strategic Planning**

Some terms we defined include:

**Mission**-what we do (serve veterans)

**Vision**-where are we going? (a new organization?)

**Goals**-how we get there.

**Objectives**-measurable achievements toward a goal.

The Conventional is the most common model of strategic planning. It is ideal for organization such as VVA that has sufficient resources to pursue ambitious visions and goals, has external environments that are stable (chapters), and do not have a large number of issues to address.

**The model includes the following overall phases:**

1. Develop or update the mission and optionally, vision and goal statements.
2. Take a wide look around the outside and a good look inside the organization, and perhaps update the statements as a result.
3. As a result of this examination, select the multi-year strategies and/or goals to achieve the vision.
4. Then develop action plans that specify who is going to do what and by when to achieve each goal.
5. Identify associated plans, for example, staffing, facilities, marketing, and financial plans.
6. Organize items 1-3 into a Strategic Plan and items 4-6 into a separate one-year Operational Plan.

Working Group II was given some team tools to work with including: flow charts, cause and effect diagrams, root cause identification, and decision making processes.

The strategic planning process included systematic reflections including:  
Reviewing the VVA's mission, vision and values of the organization.

**We did a SWOT Review:**

**S**= Strengths-what practices are really working well, organizational competencies, effective processes.

**W**=Weaknesses-knowledge gaps, inefficient procedures, lack of value, synergy

**O**=Opportunities-untapped resources, positive changes in external environment

**T**=Threats-environmental changes, threatened resources, unwise practices.

Since 2017, Working Group II has met prior to each board meeting and at the Leadership Conference last year in Palm Springs. Besides working in a group setting, countless hours were spent in communication, outreach, and research.

The original motion for Panel B (later changed to Working Group II) was **“to determine the feasibility of forming, chartering, funding and/or empowering a new veterans’ organization to perpetuate our legacy.”**

**Conclusion:** It is feasible to form a new veterans’ organization.



## FEASIBILITY STUDY

### Lead, form, chartering, funding, empowerment, assure the tomorrow of all veterans

Working Group II was mandated to “Determine the FEASIBILITY of forming, chartering, funding and/or empowerment of a new veterans’ organization to perpetuate our legacy and assure the tomorrow of all veterans which will be communicated to the general membership (delegates) for approval at a convention.”

It has come to our attention that there are still many members who are not aware of the results of Working Group II in determining the feasibility of creating a new veteran organization to carry on the work of Vietnam Veterans of America – “In Service to America.”

We, do, indeed believe it is very feasible to begin a new organization to help assure the future well-being of all veterans, and to pass along our legacy of knowledge, activism, advocacy and service.

Who will form the core of this new organization?

We anticipate the initial core members of the new organization will be volunteers from VVA, who are interested in working with the new generations of younger veterans. We presume, that as the parent organization, VVA will select these new core members, though we have been given no guidelines to how this might happen, nor was it in our mandate to determine this.

We will give this new generation of veterans all the help we know how to give. We will pass on to them as much as possible of our hard-earned knowledge and experience in the form of mentoring, partnerships, hands-on guidance, literature and more. This will be a major part of our legacy to them. We ultimately plan for this new organization to ‘fly free’ in a few years.

What will be the shape of this new organization?

This question addressed, among other things, chartering a new organization. Current status quo makes it unlikely this organization will receive a charter from Congress, as Congress is currently not issuing charters. And since one of issues of “last man standing” is not making changes to VVA’s charter, a new organization may be founded, but will not be chartered as such.

Future membership in the organization, once it is on its own, will be determined as is any other organization – by the membership itself. If our personal contacts and multiple surveys have been accurate, and we believe they have, this new organization will be open to all veterans, and will also be welcoming to families. Structure will almost certainly not be national-state-local chapter style. This generation doesn’t need tiers for communication. Communication is now instant and 2-way.

We can and most probably will, recommend a C-19 organizational status, but again, this organization as it grows, will determine its own needs and format.

Where will this organization be organized?

This, also, is not within the mandate of Working Group II, and will most probably be decided by the core founding group with input and affirmation of VVA itself.

What need would this new organization meet that is not currently being met by one or more of the multitude of organizations that currently serve veterans and/or advocate for their needs?

Working Group II met with younger generation veterans both in person, and through multiple surveys. We learned that this generation of vets is very different from us in how they will meet their needs. They

are the connected generation, the social media generation - the ones that walk around with a cell phone glued to their hands. We learned they have no interest in sitting around drinking in a smoky club. They don't want to have "home associations" and regularly scheduled monthly meetings. They want organizations that will regularly include family members, unlike most of our current vets' organizations. This means that organizations like the American Legion, VFW and, yes, VVA, will not, as they are currently organized, meet the needs of younger veterans.

We reviewed the kinds of organizations the younger vets \*have\* started. Some examples are One Fight, Team Rubicon, Red, White and Blue. Each one of these organizations has different purposes, goals, organization. But one thing they have in common is they do NOT advocate for younger veterans. They don't engage with legislators. They don't have VSOs. In short, most of them are very single-purposed. In a way, these younger veterans "don't know what they don't know."

They need to realize that if they do not stand up for themselves before the VA, before Congress, they are going to discover that their interests will be over-ridden by short-sighted, money-oriented, civilians who have never served, and will cut benefits and prioritize their own pocketbook issues over care and support for those who have served. This is one of the major goals of "assuring a tomorrow for all veterans." Even now, the service organizations struggle to ensure quality medical care, public respect, employment opportunities for those who have served - and it's a tough row to hoe. Without some form of organized advocacy for veterans, ground will be lost rapidly.

Sure, we could just decide "well, if they don't want to do it our way, screw 'em." But that wasn't what we decided years ago when we developed, as our founding principle, "Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another." We didn't say "we'll only help them if they want to do it our way." Is that what we have decided now? I certainly hope not. I would personally feel it is a betrayal of what I have joined and worked for as long as I have been a member.

What does "perpetuating our legacy" and "assure the tomorrow of all veterans" mean? What is the purpose of this new organization in terms of the activities it would engage in? Would this new organization be expected to work on all the topics VVA has addressed thru its multitude of committees or would it only conduct certain activities such as benefits claims and legislative monitoring and advocacy? Is there an expectation that this new organization would continue to advocate for needs of Vietnam-era veterans that might not be a priority to newer veterans?

Perpetuating our legacy means just what it says it does. We have a great legacy to pass on. It includes: legislative expertise, issue advocacy, reputation on Capitol Hill, accomplishments such as bad paper review, veterans courts, working with incarcerated veterans -- all the activities and achievements that have given VVA the reputation it has in many places.

Assuring the tomorrow of all veterans means working toward the benefit of all veterans, not just our own generation. By helping veterans navigate the VA system, passing the Missing Service Personnel Act which prevents service members from being declared dead without strong supporting evidence, continuing to advocate for issues of importance to veterans we are helping to assure a good future for those who serve.

We would work with the new members of this organization, providing them with all of this legacy aforementioned, pointing out to them how important issue advocacy and legislative strength has been to all generations of veterans. Finally, the expectation is that a new veteran's organization would be open to all veterans, and all veterans would be advocated for.

HOW? VVA will initially provide a skeleton framework of VVA members with the clear and immediate intention of passing the organization along to younger generation member veterans. This will be their organization to shape as they wish. We will provide initial funding, guidance, experience, information. We will provide the wood, the nails, the hammers and experience in drawing blueprints. They will create a building that will meet their needs.