

Tennessee Department of Veterans Services  
Accreditation Process  
Revised September 2015

I. HISTORY

As required in Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 38 Chapter 1 Part 14.629, all veteran service organizations and their representatives, agents and attorneys must be accredited with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in order to assist claimants in the preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims for VA benefits.

The Tennessee Department of Veterans Services (TDVS) is a state organization accredited with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. TDVS is required to certify applications for accreditations with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs General Counsel for each person the department recommends for accreditation as a representative of their respective county, service organization or as a TDVS employee.

Tennessee Code Annotated 58-3-111 (d) states "All veterans' service officers shall successfully complete training and be issued accreditation by the Department of Veterans' Affairs within one (1) year from the date of appointment. Any veterans' service officer who does not complete the required training and receive accreditation within one (1) year of appointment shall be removed from office by the governing body or bodies of the political subdivisions creating the veterans' service office by which the officer is employed."

In order for a TDVS Veterans Resource Coordinator (VRC), Veterans Appeals Paralegal Specialist or County Service Officer (CSO) to assist veterans in filing claims for benefits, they must be recommended by a recognized organization, such as TDVS, for accreditation with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and must meet the following criteria:

- (1) Be a paid employee of the State of Tennessee, working as a service officer or a paid employee of the county working as a CSO for no less than 1,000 hours annually

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- (2) Successfully complete a course of training and an examination which has been approved by VA Regional Counsel with jurisdiction for the state
- (3) Will receive both regular supervision and monitoring as well as mandatory training to assure continued qualification as a representative in the claims process
- (4) Is not employed in any civil, military department or agency of the United States
- (5) Is of good character and reputation and has demonstrated an ability to represent claimants before the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

## II. STEPS TO OBTAIN ACCREDITATION

TDVS Assistant Commissioner of the Appeals Division is authorized to certify applications for TDVS accreditations for TDVS employees and CSO's. Accreditation with other service organizations must be certified by that specific organization. Service Officers seeking accreditation with organizations other than TDVS must submit an individual VA Form 21 to each requested organization and meet the accreditation requirements established by that organization.

### A. THE PROCESS

- 1) TDVS employees: Accreditation requests will be submitted after completion of Phase Two training by TDVS Training Division.  
County Service Officer: A letter on official letterhead from the county mayor/county executive certifying employment by the county working a minimum of 1,000 hours per year or 20 hours per week as a CSO.

Mail official correspondence to:

TDVS Appeals Division  
ATTN: Assistant Commissioner  
110 Ninth Ave. South  
Room C-166  
Nashville, TN 37043

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- TDVS Appeals Division will create a file on each applicant and maintain the official correspondence for future use.
- 2) TDVS employee or CSO through coordination with Regional Commissioner will coordinate training for Service Connected Compensation Disability (Phase One) and Pension (Phase Two) training. Upon completion of Phase Two, the TDVS Training Division will administer an accreditation examination to newly hired TDVS employees and CSO's. Newly hired TDVS employees and CSO's must achieve a minimum score of 70 to receive accreditation from TDVS.
  - 3) The names of newly hired TDVS employees and CSO's with passing accreditation examination scores will be forwarded to TDVS Appeals Division for preparation/certification of VA Form 21, Application for Accreditation.
  - 4) Within five (5) business days of receipt of passing grade, the TDVS Assistant Commissioner of the Appeals Division will prepare a letter to VA General Counsel, prepare and certify VA Form 21 with appropriate TDVS employee or CSO information and forward to applicant. The requesting TDVS employee or CSO will complete and sign VA Form 21 and forward along with the completed letter from TDVS Assistant Commissioner of the Appeals Division to the Office of General Counsel in the envelope provided with an information copy retained for their records. Allow at least 90 days for approval of accreditation by Office of General Counsel.
  - 5) Upon receiving credentials from Office of General Counsel, recipients should email or mail an information copy to TDVS Assistant Commissioner of the Appeals Division at the address listed above.
  - 6) TDVS Assistant Commissioner of the Appeals Division will submit accreditation approvals within five (5) days of receipt to Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO) Nashville. VARO grants applicants access to

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information for claimants who have elected TDVS as their Power of Attorney (POA).

B. EXPECTATIONS AND OPTIONS:

- 1) TDVS accreditation must be awarded within one (1) year of employment.
- 2) Applicants who fail the examination will be afforded an opportunity for remedial training and re-testing provided sufficient time remains for award of accreditation within one (1) year.
- 3) Counties with limited budgets can request Phase One and Phase Two training using webinar or video teleconferencing resources.

III. REQUIREMENTS FOR MAINTAINING ACCREDITATION

38 CFR 14.629 (a) requires the organization's certifying official, for each of its accredited representatives, to sign and file with the Office of General Counsel, not later than five years after initial accreditation through that organization or the most recent recertification by that organization, VA Form 21 to certify that the representative continues to meet the criteria for accreditation. In recommending a person, the organization shall certify that the designee continues to meet the criteria stated for initial accreditation.

TDVS employees and CSO's hired after January, 2015 will not be required to pass the annual examination until they have completed one (1) year of service in claims assistance.

- 1) TDVS employee: TDVS Human Resource Officer will inform TDVS Assistant Commissioner of the Appeals Division of any changes in employee status to request revocation of accreditation for employees no longer serving in a claims assistance capacity.

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CSO's: Submit a letter on official letterhead signed by the county mayor/executive certifying the employed CSO continues to work a minimum of 1,000 hours each year or 20 hours per week. All correspondence is to be sent to TDVS Assistant Commissioner of the Appeals Division no later than June 30 annually.

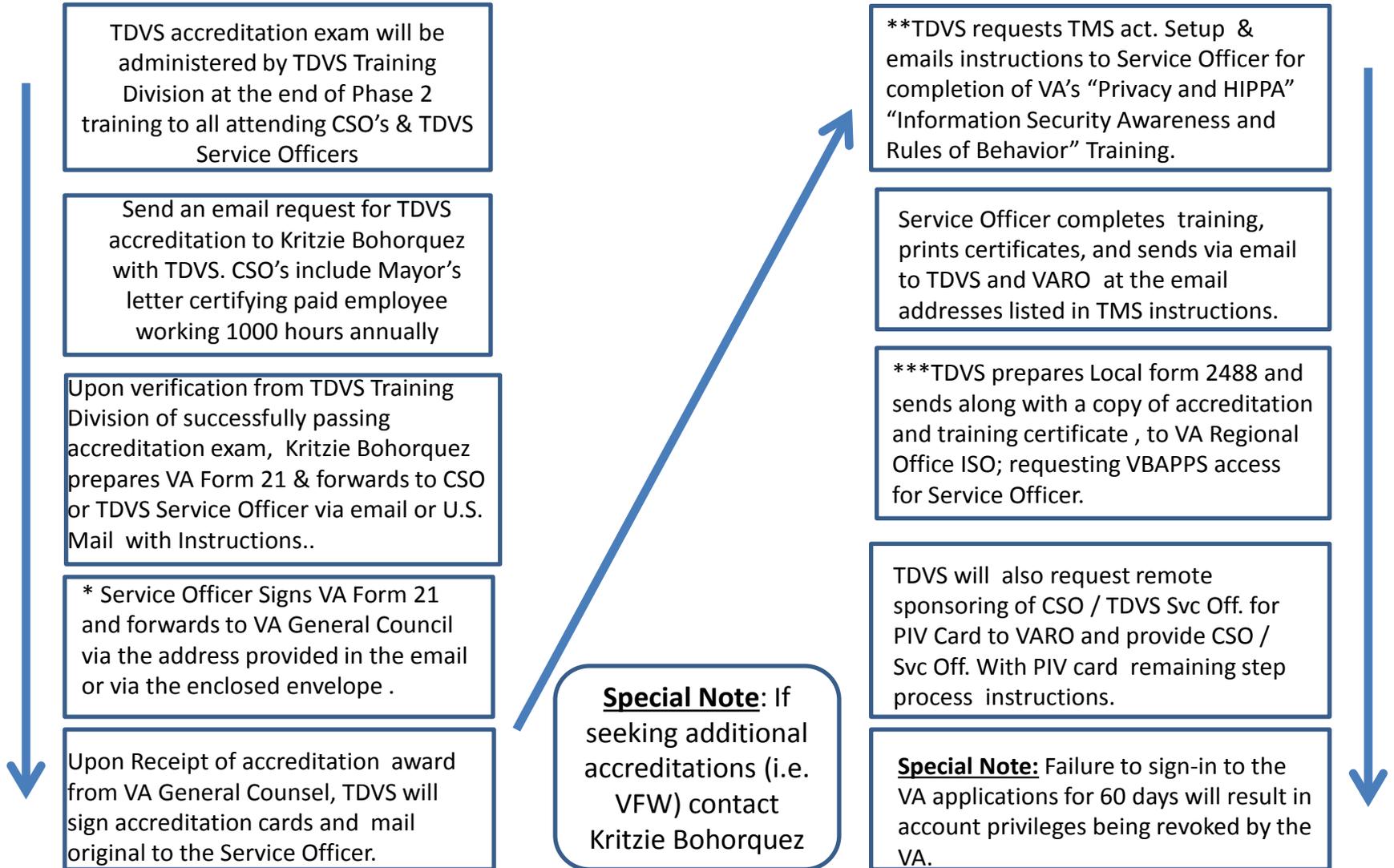
- 2) TDVS provides regional proficiency training which consists of three (3) one-day sessions and one (1) two-day session for service officers. Annual testing of all accredited service officers will be conducted at the conclusion of two-day session which will normally be held during the month of September.
- 3) To ensure that all TDVS employees and CSO's are adequately trained to prepare, present, and prosecute claims before the VA, attendance is mandatory at all proficiency training events. TDVS employees and CSOs who are unable to attend a training session must submit justification to their Regional Director and/or Regional Commissioner 48 hours prior to training. Regional Commissioners will review justifications and determine approval.
- 4) TDVS employees and CSO's are required to maintain an average passing score of 70 on the annual examination. The average will be based on the last three (3) annual examinations. Those who fail to maintain an average passing score will be afforded remedial training by the TDVS Training Officer and will re-test within 180 days of the last failed examination. Although a re-test may include similar questions, the actual examination will be a different version.
- 5) Regional Commissioners will monitor and recommend revocation of accreditation to the TDVS Commissioner and personally meet with county mayor/ county executive for CSO's who:
  - a) Fail to meet the required 1000 hours per year of employment
  - b) Did not attend two (2) or more mandatory training sessions in a 12 month period



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- c) Fail to maintain an average three (3) year passing score of 70 percent on examinations

# TDVS Accreditation / VA Systems ACCESS / PIV Card Sponsorship Process



- \* Please allow 90 days for the General Counsel to award and mail the certificate of accreditation to claims office
- \*\* Training is required each year. VA will notify Service Officers via email of required completion date
- \*\*\* Please allow 30 days for access