



Concept report

NYC PRIVATE FIRST-CLASS JOSEPH P. DWYER peer support fund at DVS

EPIN:

I. Background and Purpose:

The mission of the NYC Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) is to connect, mobilize, and empower New York City's Veteran community to foster purpose-driven lives for US Military Service Members—past and present—in addition to their caregivers, survivors, and families.

Recognizing that New York City is home to approximately 210,000 prior and current Military Service Members in addition to an estimated 420,000 immediate Veteran & Military family members, DVS seeks to do everything that it can on behalf of the City of New York to repay our Veteran community for their sacrifice. In partnership with hundreds of community-based organizations and several city, state, and federal entities, DVS enables those whom we assist to receive VA claims-related benefits, housing support, access to VA healthcare, employment resources, educational offerings, mental health programming, and several other amenities.

Despite the array of programs and services available for Veterans, a 2021 community survey conducted by DVS revealed that one out of four NYC-based Active-Duty Service Members, Reservists, National Guardsmen, and Veterans say that they are lonely three or more days per week. Only one-third of lonely respondents feel as though they have someone they can approach when they are in need; having someone to approach is defined as having a person with whom one can share joys and sorrows on at least three days per week. Moreover, when asked how likely they are to seek help for emotional distress, 40% of all lonely respondents would be somewhat or very unlikely to do so.

The PFC Joseph P. Dwyer ("Dwyer") Peer Support Program, first established by the State of New York during the 2012-2013 legislative session, aims to reduce Veteran isolation and associated mental health issues by having Veteran community

members meet with fellow members in secure, comfortable settings; this helps them cope with emotional issues caused during or exacerbated by their military service. In essence, the program builds a unique healing community whereby Veterans and their loved ones integrate into a life-affirming support system, enabling them to successfully reset and acclimate to civilian life.

The Dwyer Program exists in 25 counties throughout New York State. New York localities that have received funding through the program ascribe to a diverse cross-section of intervention modalities. For the first time, the City of New York has been awarded funds to establish its own program for up to one year.

The PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer to Peer Program Implementation Guide issued by SUNY/Albany's School of Social Welfare recommends that "rather than replicating traditional clinical support services (e.g., counseling or therapy), the Dwyer Programs offer non-clinical peer-delivered supports." Many Veterans and Veteran family members avoid traditional provider-delivered mental health services because of stigma (actual or perceived), logistical and administrative hurdles, previous negative experiences, and other reasons. Seeking help is not always a common experience for Veterans and their loved ones. Further, many Veterans distrust those professionals who are not Veteran community members themselves.

The New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) wishes to collaborate with a network of Veteran and community-based organizations to enhance social engagement, fortify emotional wellness, and encourage help-seeking behavior among Active-Duty Service Members, Veterans, and their families through various types of cultural, educational, health, and recreational activities favored by the Veteran community. Following the release of this concept paper, DVS will issue a request for proposals (RFP) for the NYC private first-class Joseph P. Dwyer peer support fund. On the upcoming RFP, DVS will receive proposals from organizations who can support in the mission of providing the above services for current and prior military service members and their families within the city of New York.

II. Program Model:

DVS' goal is to provide peer-to-peer support programs that will empower US Military Service members, past and present—in addition to their caregivers, survivors, and families—to enhance their social engagement, fortify their emotional wellness, and encourage help-seeking behavior, thereby reducing social isolation. We envision offering a broad selection of arts, music, health and wellness, athletic, culinary, educational, and other community-based programs aimed towards peaking the wide

interests of Veterans (and Veteran family members) of all service eras, genders, races/ethnicities, disability statuses, ages, and other demographics. These services must be held in person and not virtually.

We ask providers to create a compassionate and accepting environment where Veterans (caregivers, survivors, and families) can engage in a novel activity with other participants and by doing so build comradery and mutual support for each other. We believe this can best occur if one consistent type of activity is offered rather than multiple activities rolled into one program.

Our intent is for participants to show up on a recurring and consistent basis to develop cohesion rather than opting in or out of programs that offer different activities. The number, frequency, and duration of each of the sessions will vary based upon several factors including, but not limited to, type of activity, whether activity takes place indoors vs. outdoors, and proposed budget. Each session should last at least 30 minutes. All sessions must be in-person, and free to Veterans, their caregivers, families, and survivors.

Collaboration among organizations is recommended especially for recruiting program participants. All proposals that meet the requirements will be considered, and DVS highly encourages partnership with local Veteran Service Organizations in our communities like the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America, Disabled Veterans of America, Jewish War Veterans, Catholic War Veterans, Student Veterans of America located at NYC colleges and universities, etc., demonstrate that they will connect with each other and collaborate to develop a robust program for our Veterans.

Examples of services to be offered to Veteran Community are animal-assisted modalities, somatic modalities, culinary arts instruction, and community construction programs.

Note: Providers are encouraged to propose other creative programs. The examples provided above are not all-inclusive. The main goal is to provide services that are appealing to the Veteran population and that fall in line with the identified scope of work.

III. Funding Information and Proposed Contract Term:

The total funding for this program is not to exceed \$560,000 for one year. The source of the funding is from a grant from New York State to New York City Department of Health

and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). Through an MOU with DOHMH, New York City Department of Veterans Services will use these funds to support the NYC private first-class Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support program.

More than one vendor is expected be awarded under the RFP since it is expected that local VSOs will submit proposals. Average level of funding of each award may range from \$20,000 up to \$100,000 depending on the size and scope of the program offerings by vendors. Proposals up to the full amount of the award will also be considered.

The term of the contract(s) awarded from this RFP will be one year long, from January 15, 2024, to January 15, 2025.

IV. Planned Method of Evaluating Proposals:

DVS has identified the following priority areas of focus for its support: recreational, artistic, athletic, culinary, educational, health and wellness, and community building programs. A Respondent's proposed services need not meet all areas listed but should align with at least one of these areas. Services should be administered in an in-person group setting rather than one-on-one.

Proposals will be evaluated by assigning a score to the vendor's proposed project plans, outreach methods, retention strategies, previous experience, staff's competency, proposed program measurements and reporting, and fund allocation plans.

V. Program Participation:

DVS expects Veteran participation to be around 10 – 25 Veteran participants per program depending on program offerings. This range of numbers may increase due to marketing and increase of interest in the Veteran population. Vendors may offer more than one type of program in their proposal, for example, programs directed and focused on different Veteran communities (examples include, but are not limited to, Veterans, Veteran family members, of all service eras, genders, races/ethnicities, disability statuses, ages, and other demographics); or a variety of activities that are in line with non-clinical forms of mental health therapy (examples include but are

not limited to animal-assisted modalities, somatic modalities, culinary arts instruction, and community construction programs).

Service hours of the program can differ dependent on the organizations' hours of operations, which could range from 7am to 10pm weekdays and/or weekends. The duration of each session should be no less than 30 minutes.

VI. Reporting Requirements:

DVS will require Contractors to submit quarterly reports detailing program participation which will include the following metrics:

- survey results about satisfaction of Participants,
- socialization improvements
- connectedness to community
- participant retention
- participant demographics including but not limited to
 - o Veterans
 - o Veteran family members
 - o Veterans and Veteran Family Members of all service eras, genders, races/ethnicities, disability statuses, and ages.

VII. Procurement Timeline:

- Expected Concept Paper release: 10/10/2023
- Expected RFP release: 11/24/2023
- Expected proposal submission deadline: 12/14/2023
- Expected award announcement date: 12/28/2023
- Expected start date for contract(s): 1/12/2023

VIII. Questions/comments:

Comments in response to this Concept Paper may be submitted, by uploading your comments into the Questionnaire tab of the PRIVATE FIRST-CLASS JOSEPH P. DWYER PEER SUPPORT FUND (EPIN 06324Y0008) RFI and submitting the response in PASSPort. Alternatively, you may also submit your comments via email to DVSDwyer@veterans.nyc.gov.