



New Mexico State Approving Agency

PRESENTER:

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New Mexico State Approving Agency

- State Approving Agency Overview
- State Approving Agency Current Core Functions
- New Mexico State Approving Agency Concerns
- Recommendations for the changes to the State Approving Agency

State Approving Agency Overview

Each State has a State Approving Agency (SAA) and a few have two or three. Some states have one agency to approve all school programs, another agency to approve all on-the-job training programs, and then possibly a third agency to approve the flight schools. New Mexico has one State Approving Agency that approves all school and on-the-job training programs to allow Veterans to receive GI Benefits. The Department of Veteran Affairs approves all flight schools.

The primary responsibility and focus of the SAA's is to review, evaluate and approve quality programs of education and training under state and federal criteria. SAAs conduct on-site supervisory visits to approved institutions and schools. They also provide technical assistance to all interested parties and are engaged in outreach activities to foster the usage of the GI Bill.

The programs which can be approved are found in institutions of higher learning (colleges and universities), non-degree institutions (vocational and technical schools), apprenticeship programs, other on-the-job training programs, and flight training schools. Each state reviews the quality of each program per its own standards and laws in addition to VA rules and regulations and any other applicable laws and/or regulations. Then it is either approved or disapproved; continuous supervision is required of approved programs.

State Approving Agency Current Core Functions

Approval of programs

- Respond to inquiries timely
- Review and respond to program approval requests
- Completed approval action notification to school/establishment and to Department of Veteran Affairs

Supervision of schools and training establishments

- Supervisory visits
- Visits at the request of VA
- Data collection at request of VA

Technical Assistance

- School meetings
- Direct assistance to facility official with any aspect of approval process
- Provide assistance during telephone interviews where approval criteria and process are discussed

Liaison

- Hold periodic meetings and regular telephone discussions with VARO (VA Regional Office) staff to review progress of business/budget plan

Contract Compliance

- Preparation of invoices for VA reimbursement
- Preparation of quarterly report of activity

Outreach

- Events (job fairs and state conferences)
- Publications

Changes to the State Approving Agencies

The second session of the one hundredth and eleventh session of Congress (December 2010) Section 203 of Public Law 111-377 made the following changes to the State Approving Agencies:

- Public and non-profit accredited degree granting institution of higher learning are approved
- The Secretary of the VA may approve accredited for-profit institutions of higher learning
- The Secretary may use the State Approving Agencies for compliance surveys

New Mexico State Approving Agency Concerns

- We are particularly concerned with the changes in law impacting the State Approving Agency – shifting our role from **approving body** to performing **compliance surveys** at the approved education/training facilities. Through the approval process, the SAA reviews programs and policies. The agency advises the institutions/facilities when programs or policies do not meet federal regulations.
- Currently the VA Education Liaison Representative and Compliance Survey Specialists performs compliance surveys at approved facilities. Compliance is an **audit**, reviewing the Veteran's files. When veterans have been certified in a program that has not been approved (most of the time in error), the VA creates an overpayment to the veteran and a debt is created. ***This office does not feel it is in the best interest of the state to create debts against veterans.***
- The Secretary of the Department of Veteran's Affairs now has the authority to approve all accredited for-profit institutions of higher learning. This does cause concern in regards to institutions of higher learning that have programs that do not meet federal regulations.

Solution to the changes for the State Approving Agency

- Congress to Repeal Section 203 of Public Law 111-377.
- The federal government in conjunction with the SAA's should study the functions of the State Approving Agency
- Training for school/training facility certifying officials should be a core function of the SAA. When certifying officials are trained properly, less overpayments/debts are created against veterans

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