OPERATIONALISATION OF COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Introduction

1. **Strategic Intent.** The strategic intent of operationalisation is mandated conjointly by the ATDP Blueprint and the DVA Strategic Plan, ‘DVA Towards 2020’:
   
   ‘The delivery of high quality advocacy services to DVA clients’.

2. **Strategic Policy.** With specific respect to ATDP operationalisation, the proposal is that:
   
   a. the RTO will train selected, experienced and appropriately qualified Advocates in mentoring¹ and workplace assessment;
   
   b. the RTO will certify those authorised to practice as workplace assessors by Certificate of Attainment in Workplace Assessment; and
   
   c. Communities of Practice (CoP) will begin formal operation as soon as:
      
      (i) Workplace Assessors have been authorised; and
      
      (ii) Mentors² have been trained; and
      
      (iii) RMG Members appointed; and
      
      (iv) prospective CoPs Expressions of Interest have been considered.

3. **Definition.** FAQ 6.05 identifies the limits and outlines the function of CoP:
   
   a. A [CoP] is a network of advocates and community members support[ing] each other within a locality such as a state or region...
   
   b. [members] engage in collective learning and support one another through mentoring, knowledge-sharing and networking...
   
   c. there is no one-size-fits-all model... groups will either meet face-to-face or communicate by telephone or in an on-line forum...
   
   d. All will be welcome...including ATDP trainers, ESO volunteers, advocates of all levels of experience an veterans and their family members...
   
   e. A central focus will be the mentoring experience from one advocate to another, which is fundamental to the success of the ATDP... (emphasis added)

4. **Roles.** The Blueprint identifies the following roles for CoPs:
   
   a. building strong, supportive networks for practitioners;
   
   b. engaging and developing volunteerism;
   
   c. identifying future practitioners and trainers;
   
   d. fostering the development of the broader practitioner community; and
   
   e. ensuring clear and regular communication from all levels of the Programme to learning facilitators, CoP, [Veteran Centres (VC)], ESOs, and practitioners.

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¹ Mentoring will include OJT, coaching, counselling as well as mentoring (Darryl Proud, MTS, 22Aug16).
² The rationale for entitling CoP-level Learning Facilitators as Mentors is discussed in ‘Beyond Blueprint – Conceptual Foundations for Operationalisation’.
Scope

5. **Aim.** The aim is to stimulate discussion of how CoP may be operationalised during the period 01 July 2016 to 31 December 2017.

6. **Setting.** This paper:
   a. discusses indicative models for CoP, policy boundaries for operationalisation, and management and administrative arrangements;
   b. must be read in conjunction with:
      (v) ‘Operationalisation of RMGs’.
      (vi) ‘Beyond Blueprint – Conceptual Foundations for Operationalisation’, and
      (vii) ‘Operationalisation of Mentoring’.

7. **Assumption.** The assumption is that appropriate BEST Funding Eligibility and Guidelines and VITA indemnification insurance coverage and protocols will be developed to meet the needs arising from operationalisation of the advocacy system.

Operational Considerations

8. The considerations that will influence operationalisation of CoP follow.

9. **Rationale.** As OJT and mentoring constitute around 90% of advocates’ learning, effective CoP are crucial to achievement of strategic intent.

10. **Purpose.** Paraphrasing Wegner-Trayner (see ‘Beyond Blueprint’), the purpose of a CoP is to:
    
    ‘engage practitioners in collective learning and regular interaction to improve their practice.’

11. **Potential.** CoP have the potential to lift learning facilitation and quality assurance from practice to praxis.³
    a. While CoP and mentoring are necessary, they are not, of themselves, sufficient.
    b. CoP may enable information sharing and mentors may encourage improvement; but honest reflection on personal performance is essential if advocates are to transform directed practice into self-directed praxis.
    c. For the new advocacy system to reach its full potential, CoP must ensure every advocate commits willingly to self-improvement.

12. **Mentoring.** CoP Mentors will:
    a. lead their CoP as a combined welfare and compensation mentoring team;
    b. prepare trainee-advocates for certification by a Third-Party Workplace Assessor;
    c. advise the CFMG when a candidate is ready for workplace assessment;
    d. monitor certified advocates’ continuous competency improvement; and

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³ Praxis is the process by which ‘a theory, lesson, or skill is acted upon, embodied, or realised.’ It also refers to ‘the act of engaging, applying, exercising, realizing, or practising ideas.’ In the ATDP context, the term conveys the way in which on-line and face-to-face knowledge learning, mentoring, applying knowledge and skills in new circumstances, and learning from experience converge in competency improvement.
e. arrange regular advocacy workshops and other learning activities.

13. **Workplace Assessment.** Trainee-advocates and upskilling advocates will be assessed and practicing advocates’ competency development will be validated by Third Party Workplace Assessors.4

14. **Utility.** CoP are an opportunity to better use advocates with high level competence. Realisation of benefits will, inevitably, be a challenge. Issues to be considered include:

   a. **Identification.** Identifying competent advocates with the potential to develop others’ competency will necessitate objectivity.

   b. **Initial Sources.** The initial sources of CoPs are expected to arise from responses to an invitation to submit an expression of interest (EOI) from:

      (i) existing collaborative arrangements (VC, CWAN,5 and large national multi-branch/sub-branch ESOs that have established in-house training programs; and

      (ii) proposals from informal collectives of ESO branches/sub-branches that the RMG assesses to be credible and recommended by CFMG as being worthy of resourcing.

   c. **Expertise.** CoPs’ effectiveness will very much depend on their mentors’ personal attributes. Their creation will therefore be influenced by candidate-mentors’ availability. The following candidature is foreseen:

      (i) volunteer advocates acknowledged by their peers and appropriate DVA officers6 for their competence as practitioners;

      (ii) employed advocates in large multi-branch/sub-branch ESOs with effective in-house training and development programs;

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4 Workplace Assessors will be members of a national team of Workplace Assessors that is tasked by the CFMG (see Beyond Blueprint – Conceptual Setting for Operationalisation). ATDP Workplace Assessors will:

   (i) hold either a TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment or its successor, TAESS00001 Assessor Skill Set or its successor, or a diploma or higher level qualification in adult education,

   (ii) be trained in mentoring (which includes facilitation and supervision of OJT, coaching, and providing feedback),

   (iii) assess advocates’ competency by conducting workplace assessments on behalf of the RTO, pursuant to its contract with DVA,

   (iv) validate certified advocates’ continuous performance improvement,

   (v) identify competent and experienced:

      (a) CoP advocates to train and certify as CoP Learning Facilitators, and

      (b) CoP mentors to train and certify as Workplace assessors or Formal-Course Learning Facilitators.

5 Previously known as Pension and Welfare Officer Networks (PWON), the titles Compensation and Welfare Advocates suggests a new abbreviation for the Networks (CWAN).

6 These will include Deputy Commissioners, Compensation Team Leaders, and the Principal and Senior Members of the VRB.
(iii) employed or volunteer advocates from rural or remote VC/CWAN/ESOs
   who cover wide geographic areas and are already mentoring others (albeit
   informally);

(iv) advocates who of their own initiative are known to be active on social
   media correcting misinformation; and

(v) advocates who self-identify.

d. Imperatives. Pressures to create CoP quickly and individual’s misconceptions of
   their capacity to lead can reasonably be expected. Firm patience will be needed
   to counter an such pressures.

e. Disruption. Transformation of an existing organisation or group of organisations
   into a CoP will create new workloads. This can reasonably be expected to divert
   mentors’ effort from advocacy. In time, advocates’ higher levels of competency
   should offset diverted effort.

f. Resourcing. Creation of CoP will require additional resources (or changes to
   eligibility rules for existing DVA grants). This has ramifications for DVA’s internal
   allocation of its annual global budget. The Rehabilitation and Support Division
   will therefore need evidence to justify bids for an increased allocation. SGB’s
   decision that ATDP resource demands be supported by business case should
   provide that evidence.

g. Competency. Completion of a certain number of, and frequency of, welfare and
   compensation cases is essential to competency development. However,
   workload varies significantly across the advocacy community. Under-utilisation is
   a lost opportunity for competency development and a waste of resources if
   advocates are certified. The allocation of BEST funds to place trainee-advocates
   and under-utilised certified advocates in CoP with high case volumes is proposed.
   Prospective partners will need to negotiate this proposal.

h. Workload Sharing. The preceding proposal offers mutual advantage. Trainee-
   advocates and otherwise under-utilised certified advocates attain and maintain
   competency. It also offers the sponsoring VC/ESO an opportunity to offset the
   effort diverted to mentoring. Limited discussion indicates that this is attractive to
   some high workload ex-service organisations.

f. Limits. Limited discussion has, however, highlighted issues that will need to be
   resolved. Included are reputation risk, assets risk, and indemnification. These are
   critical concerns and underscore the need for negotiation of a formal CoP
   agreement.

15. Preferred Structure. CoP will bring advocates into regular contact not only with their
   mentor but also with each other. This presents an opportunity to strengthen inter-ESO
   relationships. CoP with multi-ESO membership, in particular, have the potential to
   accelerate emergence of harmonious relationships. For this reason multi-ESO CoP are
   the preferred structure.

16. Face-to-Face Only? Some TIP Trainers and a small number of advocates have been
   mentoring on-line for some time. This is contrary to a widely held perception that
   mentoring can only be conducted face-to-face.
17. **Virtual CoP.** Advocates’ experience and the National Training Manager’s paper on virtual CoP identify the following considerations:

   a. **Advantages.** A virtual CoP offers the following advantages:

      (i) posts can be monitored;

      (ii) access to posts or articles can be tracked, and

      (iii) the quality of posts, and the frequency of access and content accessed can be used to monitor learning.

   b. **ATDP Website.** The ATDP website:

      (i) has the inherent capacity to host an on-line CoP,

      (ii) is the critical component in the networked advocacy system, and

      (iii) could be an umbrella CoP within which all others reside.

   c. **ATDP Blog.** If the ATDP website includes a blog, it should only allow access by ‘members’ and be ‘moderated’ to ensure fidelity.

   d. **Social Media.** Currently, there are over 20 Facebook sites that are frequented by ex-ADF personnel and especially younger veterans.7

      (i) Relevantly, Facebook and Twitter gather information into streams or like topics, which facilitates searching.

      (ii) Although Facebook and Twitter are rarely used for learning, a small number of advocates are active on Facebook:

          (a) correcting false information;

          (b) referring readers to DVA Factsheets and CLICK pages; and

          (c) inviting confidential contact by personal Facebook message, email, sms or phone.

   e. **Younger Veterans.** Contact with younger veterans has confirmed that they:

      (i) are concerned about the quality of advocacy older advocates are providing to their cohort,

      (ii) wish to provide ‘triage’ support for ‘mates’ in crisis,

      (iii) need to know how to refer their cohort to qualified and experienced advocates, and

      (iv) want to engage more widely with their cohort (see ‘Operationalisation of Mentoring’).

18. **Constraints.** Current realities will constrain operationalisation. They include:

   a. the levels of variability in advocates’ performance; and

   b. varying levels of in-house advocacy support.

19. **Outcome.** Reasonably, CoP may aspire to:

   a. in the short term, assuring a minimum level of competency; and

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7 Some of the more frequently used Facebook sites are listed at Annex A.
b. in the medium to long term, improving competency beyond the minimum.

Models

20. Options. The following CoP structure options and features may be operationalised:

a. Virtual. The reach of virtual CoP is a very significant advantage. Mentors and advocates engaged in a virtual CoP:

(i) are not constrained by geography, or time difference (sms/email);
(ii) communicate wherever an electronic medium is available; and
(iii) practice in any location, including overseas.

b. CWAN-Based. Compensation and Welfare Advocate Network (formerly PWON) are typically convened by experienced advocates. Their typically two-monthly or quarterly meetings are invaluable and should be continued. They would, however, need to be supplemented by more regular mentor-advocate contact.

c. ESO-Based. Location, size and veteran demographics will significantly influence how ESOs may form and function as CoPs:

(i) City or urban ESOs with a large client base and many advocates may have the capacity to form a CoP in their own right; and
(ii) National ESOs with state-wide branches/sub-branches may:

(a) operate as a meta-CoP, or
(b) create local or regional CoP under the state umbrella.

d. Veteran Centre-Based. Many VCs are already in operation in some states, and exist in a range of different forms:

(i) Some that are entitled Veteran Centre provide advocacy services for only a single branch/sub-branch.
(ii) Some comprise branches/sub-branches of the same ESO in proximate locations.
(iii) Some comprise the branches/sub-branches of several ESOs within a geographic area.

e. Preferred Structure. Reflecting Governments’ long-standing concern about the disparate opinions expressed across the ESO community, multi-ESO CoP are the preferred structure. The perceived advantages are:

(i) amalgamation of diverse interests and cultures enriches outlook;
(ii) VC’s administrative staff can administer CoP, allowing mentors to focus on their primary role;
(iii) mentors are independent of the constituent ESO branches/sub-branches;\(^8\) and

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\(^8\) Paraphrasing Mao Zedong: "The [CoP Mentors] must move amongst the [Advocates] as a fish swims in the sea."
(iv) being independent, mentors’ are able to avoid perceived conflicts of interest, loyalty, favouritism in frequency or quality of mentoring support, and validation of resource requests.

f. **Meta-CoP.** Contemporary communications-information-technology suggests that meta-CoP, or networks of CoP are feasible.

(i) Being on-line they are free of geographic or temporal constraint.

(ii) They could be either formal or informal.

(iii) As they would network extensively:

(a) they may duplicate information dissemination or misinformation correction during early operation; but

(b) their address books would be refined as duplication came to light.

(iv) Irrespective of their structure, they would have an identical purpose; to:

(a) locate information ‘black holes’,

(b) identify on-line misinformation, and

(c) provide authoritative information whenever needed.

(v) They would be led by trained mentors who may be:

(a) either dedicated to the task, or

(b) voluntary participants that take on meta-mentoring additional to their other mentoring and/or advocacy tasks.

(vi) Rostering could assure orderly performance, and may be:

(a) national and administered by the CFMG,

(b) regional and administered by each RMG, or

(c) sub-regional and administered collaboratively by a number of local CoP.

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**Operationalisation**

21. **Structure.** ‘Beyond Blueprint’ found that VC/CWAN/ESOs’ geographic dispersion, disparate interests and diverse cultures would be best accommodated by an organic network structure.\(^9\) CoP will be empowered to evolve in response to their own needs.

22. **National Consistency.** The rationale for the new advocacy system is nationally-consistent, client-focused, high quality advocacy services. To ensure national consistency across an organic network, ‘Beyond Blueprint’ identified the critical need for CoP empowerment to have clear policy boundaries.

23. **Policy Boundaries.** ‘Operationalisation of CoP’ outlines the policy boundaries within which, in the absence of centralised control, CoP will be empowered to self-organise.\(^10\) These include:

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\(^9\) See ‘Operationalisation of Communities of Practice’ paras 27-32.

\(^10\) See ‘Operationalisation of Communities of Practice’ para 22.
a. **Outcomes.** The advocacy system intent mandates the common outcome towards which all CoP are expected to train and develop their advocates.

b. **Membership.** Irrespective of other considerations, all CoP members accept that mentors will support only:
   (i) candidates engaged in pre-training screening; or
   (ii) trainee-advocates formally enrolled on an ATDP learning pathway; or
   (iii) Welfare or Compensation Advocates who are:
       (a) certified within ATDP,
       (b) authorised to practice, and
       (c) covered by an indemnification insurance policy; and
   (iv) maintain a comprehensive record of their activities in an ATDP workbook.

c. **Workload Sharing.** Where high client volume offers locum opportunities for external trainee or under-utilised advocates, the agreement will need to cover reputation and capital risk and indemnification insurance.

d. **Size.** Workload considerations indicate that CoP Mentors will comprise no more than:
   (i) 5-7 trainee-advocates depending on their stage along a learning pathway, or
   (ii) 15-20 certified and experienced advocates, or
   (iii) a combination of around 8-12 certified and trainee advocates.

e. **Leadership.** CoP will be led by a trained Welfare and Compensation Mentor working together as a mentoring team.

f. **Client Support.** To ensure client-focused services, CoP members will commit their advocates to working as a welfare-compensation advocacy team.

g. **Commitments.** Mutual commitments CoP members are to enter into include:
   (i) mentors’ leadership and professional support of the advocacy pool, and the objectivity and integrity with which they perform their duties;
   (ii) the maximum number of trainee and/or certified Advocates that Mentors are expected to support;
   (iv) advocates’ commitment to:
       (a) active engagement with their mentor to plan their performance improvement;
       (b) self-directed continuous improvement of their competency; and
       (c) willing engagement with an ATDP-authorised Workplace Assessor to assess RPL and competency, and to validate continuous performance improvement; and
   (iv) constituent members’ commitment to provide the resources and support essential to effective and efficient operation of the CoP.
h. **Rights of Contact.** CoP members will also commit to mentors and advocates’ rights, including:
   (i) mentors’ right to:
       (a) electronic access or entry into advocates’ place of practice, and
       (b) contact with ESO Executives to validate requests for training and applications for resourcing; and
   (ii) advocates right to contact with their CoP Mentor, including:
       (a) when and how they can schedule a mentoring session either (face-to-face or electronically), and
       (b) when urgent support is critical.

i. **Confidentiality.** Advocates’ confidentiality agreement with their clients will need to be extended to allow mentors, when mentoring, to access clients’ personal and confidential information.

j. **Monitoring and Evaluation.** While ATDP-authorised Workplace Assessors will be responsible for formal assessment and validation, CoP have a day-by-day quality assurance responsibility. The latter requires that mentors monitor advocates’ performance, discuss weaknesses, negotiate and implement remedial plans, and report to Executive Committees and through the RMG to the CFMG. These tasks will be formally agreed by CoP members to ensure mentors are able to assure quality.

k. **Limits of Authority.** Limits of Authority will be negotiated to obviate discord between CoP members and/or advocates on the one hand and mentors on the other.

l. **Indemnification.** As mentors are directly responsible for developing advocates’ competency, should a client sue for economic loss, the mentor may be joined in litigation. They will therefore need indemnification. This will be straightforward where they are the member of a organisation with VITA or other indemnification insurance. However, mentors may support an advocate in other situations; eg. when mentoring on-line or supporting a locum. In this circumstance, mentors may need direct indemnification either from VITA (or from the independent indemnification insurer).

m. **Funding.** Transfer of eligibility to CoP for BEST funding application is proposed, mirroring the role undertaken by a VC or sponsor. Should the CoP not have administrative staff, one of the members may need to auspice the application and administration. Entry into an Agreement with the Department along the lines of an ASO Agreement is suggested. As DVA pays a substantial proportion of the VITA insurance premium, such an Agreement may include indemnification.

n. **Administration.** In addition to the administration of BEST Grants, mentors will also require support with travel arrangements and operational on-costs.

o. **Dispute.** Dispute resolution provisions might include internal mediation and/or referral to the Resolution Institute. In the broad:
   (i) CoP mentors are expected to:
(a) apply their interpersonal skills to avoid misunderstandings between themselves and advocates or VC/ES executives,
(b) resolve issues between CoP members before they exacerbate into a dispute, and
(c) exercise judgement as to when their perceived objectivity and future credibility may be jeopardised by continuing attempts to resolve the issue.

(ii) Should a dispute arise between mentors and CoP members, or between CoP members, on the direction of the RMG Manager, the RMG mentor team will endeavour to resolve.

(iii) Should the RMG mentor team be unable to resolve, the matter would be resolved by either:
(a) referral to the Resolution Institute; and
(b) renegotiation of the Agreement; or
(c) dissolution of the CoP partnership.

p. Termination. The situations in which the CoP may be dissolved and conditions of termination will be agreed.

q. Agreement. CoP members will negotiate a written agreement authorising the specific application of the preceding and other local policy boundaries within which they commit to operate.

r. Signatories. The signatories of the CoP Agreement will be:
(i) the Welfare and Compensation Mentors; and
(ii) the advocates who are supported by the CoP mentors; and
(iii) where appropriate, an Executive from each member whose advocates are supported by the CoP mentors.

s. Formalisation. The alternative formal arrangements are:
(i) Exchange of Letters or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Neither of these alternatives are legally binding. Their force is moral and grounded in mutual commitment.

(ii) Service Level Agreement (SLA). This alternative is proposed where a member is currently signatory to a BEST Funding Agreement. An SLA is a contract. It will specify the terms for release of BEST funding, which will include:
(a) measures of Advocate commitment and standards of performance that are to be met; and
(b) mentor performance as measured by the outcomes monitored by RMG Mentors.

24. BEST Funding. CoP policy boundaries are intended to permit local decisions that meet local circumstances; however, each CoP must commit to achieving the intent of the advocacy system. The proposal is that eligibility for BEST funding be contingent on
validation by each CoP’s parent RMG that it is structured and operating within policy boundaries.

Identification

25. Two methods of identifying CoP and potential CoP are proposed. Each will be initiated by the Secretariat’s promulgating an invitation to Express of Interest (EOI):
   a. **CoP Self-Identification.** Using the proposed circular at Attachment 1, VCs, ESOs and other organisations will be invited to justify by EOI their claim for resourcing as a CoP.
   b. **CoP Mentor Self-Identification.** Using the Selection Criteria attached to ‘Operationalisation of Mentoring’, experienced welfare and compensation advocates will be invited to establish by EOI their credentials for selection, training and certification as CoP mentors.

26. **Linking.** Two methods of linking CoP and CoP mentor EOI are proposed:
   a. **Self-Organisation.** Ideally, EOI submitted by self-identifying CoP and CoP mentors will have already combined their EOI into a single submission. The notification covering the invitations to submit an EOI will encourage joint submissions.
   b. **Directed Organisation.** Where unlinked EOI are submitted, the Secretariat, with the support of the relevant RMG, will identify parties that by proximity, mode of operation, or existing organisation may be linked. While this should not be an onerous task, it may be a protracted process. It also adds an extra level of risk. Networking experience shows that bringing parties together who (probably) have had no prior working relationship, is more prone to failure.

Selection

27. **CoP Roll-Out.** Ideally, identification of potential CoP will be started before invitations for Expressions of Interest from mentor candidates are circulated. Self-identification by prospective CoP to should therefore start not later than mid-August. A suggested invitation is attached to this paper.

28. **Alerting Possible CoP.** Existing structures through which invitation may be extended to potential CoP include the following (by no means exhaustively):
   a. DVA Deputy Commissioner’s Consultative Forums in each State;
   b. TIP State Training Managers in each State;
   c. formal and informal on-line exchanges of information between TIP Trainers (viz., ATDP Formal Learning Facilitators) and trainee-advocates;
   d. ESORT, and the State Offices of each Ex-Service Organisation;
   e. virtual CoP such as Australian Veterans Law Advocacy Network (AVLAN) and the Association of Ex-Service Advocates Australia; and
   f. Facebook Groups with the potential to become nation-wide on-line meta-CoP such as (the multi-ESO) Alliance of Defence Service Organisations (ADSO), (the multi-Service) Women Veterans Network Australia, Young Diggers, Soldier On, Mates4Mates, the Australian Defence Force and Veterans Alliance Forum, Aussie
Risks
29. Accepting that other risks may emerge during operationalisation, the following risks have been identified:
   a. Reputation risk.
   b. Assets and Indemnification Risk.
   c. Insufficient numbers of organisations express interest in creating a CoP.
   d. Supported CoP prove subsequently to be unsustainable.

Risk Management
30. Given the complexity of and diversity of participants engaged in operationalisation, risk identification and development of risk management strategies will remain a key ongoing governance, management and administration task at all levels. These will be a shared responsibility for all engaged in operation of the advocacy system. The following risk management strategies are envisaged to manage the risks identified to date:
   a. **Reputation Risk.** Associated with organisations or people with different values, motivations and interests collaborating to achieve an outcome they may not accomplish independently, reputation risk can be minimised by:
      (i) participants not rushing into a formal relationship;
      (ii) before formalising their partnership, all participants ensuring they:
            (a) are committed to the same outcome,
            (b) accept the policy boundaries and have agreed the specifics on how they will operationalise them;
            (c) understand each other’s values, motivations and interests and acknowledge frankly where they differ;
            (d) ensuring they are comfortable at both the organisational and human levels that the ‘fit feels right’;
            (e) develop an implementation plan that identifies outcomes, milestones and timelines, and commit to contributing resources in the measure needed, on time and for the period required;
            (f) are prepared to enter into a formal agreement that underpins their partnership and which includes agreement on at least the issues identified in para 22.
   b. **Assets and Indemnification Risk.** Again, associated with collaboration by entities with different values, motivations and interests, asset and indemnification risk may be minimised by:
(i) careful selection of potential partners, understanding each other at the organisational and human levels, and patient negotiation of the terms of partnership;

(ii) ensuring that levels of training, certification, currency and ongoing competency are mutually acceptable, and are monitored and evaluated by a mutually trusted mentor (who will most probably be a third party whose objectivity is mutually acknowledged);

(iii) negotiating the terms of collaboration and indemnification with insurers; and

(iv) ensuring organisation executives authorise entry into the partnership, are satisfied with the terms of arrangement, and understand the risks and the risk management arrangements.

c. **Insufficient Interest in CoP.** This risk is best managed by the decisions made by the SGB and Secretariat. Relevantly, the best risk containment decision is also contrary to any implementation imperative. Should insufficient CoP candidates self-identify, the ‘holes’ in mentoring coverage will need to be accepted. As TIP training will continue to 31 December 2017, TIP-trained advocates will nominally be current until 31 December 2020, providing four years of focused effort by SGBs to foster creation of CoP in otherwise unsupported areas. This decision rests on the risk management principle outlined at sub-para a above. In the meantime, categorisation of CoP candidates into tiers is proposed to facilitate risk management:

(i) **Tier 1 Candidates:**

   (a) The initial focus will be on VC with already formalised collaborative relationships that are clearly working productively and are prepared to commit to continuous improvement beyond their existing levels of service delivery by adopting single training pathways, transitioning to a CoP, strengthening their client-focus, and developing their advocates’ competency.

   (b) Of equal first priority will be those ESOs/Branches/Sub-Branches that are committed to single pathway training, have comprehensive in-house training and development programs that assure high levels of competency, and employ or are successfully recruiting advocates from the cohort of younger veterans.

(ii) **Tier 2 Candidates.** Next in priority are ESO Branches/Sub-Branches with an established collaborative relationship with another ESOs’ Branches/Sub-Branches, that:

   (a) has not yet been formalised but is working productively; and

   (b) are all committed to full participation in single training pathways and mentoring;

   (c) are all fully committed to the intent of the new advocacy system; and
(d) in time and with support, might transform into a formalised partnership.

(iii) **Tier 3 Candidates.** Third in priority are ESO Branches/Sub-Branches with an established collaborative relationship with Branches/Sub-Branches of the same ESO, that:

(a) are working productively; and

(b) are all committed to full participation in single training pathways and mentoring;

(c) are all fully committed to the intent of the new advocacy system; and

(d) in time and with support, might transform into a formalised partnership.

(iv) **Tier 4 Candidates.** Any CoP candidate that is not categorised in Tiers 1 to 3 will be seen as a medium to long-term prospect. To minimise risk during progression and on eventual formalisation, Tier 4 candidates will be guided during progression towards CoP formation by the relevant RMG Mentors, and provided mentoring supported when/of appropriate by a proximate CoP mentoring team. Crucially, Tier 4 candidates must not be pressured to form. They must be allowed to evolve while being guided and encouraged dispassionately.

d. **Unsustainable CoP.** Consistent with the principle that partnerships evolve, and the reality that unforeseen organisational and/or human issues can reasonably be expected to arise, some level of failure of CoP needs to be accepted. When failure occurs, support of progression towards a new relationship will be provided by the relevant RMG and disruption to mentoring by RMG mentors supported when/of appropriate by a proximate CoP mentoring team.

**Recommendations**

31. The recommendations are that:

a. The SGB, CFMG and Secretariat propose amendments to finalise this paper.

b. Once finalised, the paper become a policy document and be operationalised.

c. The policy be formally reviewed quarterly during operationalisation and amended to account for arising issues.

**Attachment:** 1. Suggested Invitation to Form a CoP  
2. Indicative List of ESO, and Web and Facebook Sites
INVITATION TO CREATE A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Background

The ESO community and the Departments of Veterans’ Affairs and Defence are rolling out a new program of training and development for Veteran Centre and Ex-Service Organisation’s welfare and compensation advocates. You can learn more about the Advocacy Training and Development Programme (ATDP) on the DVA (http://www.dva.gov.au/consultation-and-grants/reviews) and ATDP (http://www.atdp.org.au/atdpMain.php) websites.

Objective

The objective of ATDP is to ensure that ex-ADF personnel and their dependents receive high quality advocacy services from Veteran Centres and Ex-Service Organisations.

Communities of Practice

The formation of communities of practice (CoP) is a vital element in improving the delivery of advocacy services to DVA clients. Each CoP will be led by a mentoring team comprising experienced welfare and compensation advocates who have been trained and certified in mentoring and workplace assessment.

Each community of practice will link advocates with a mentor, who will facilitate their collective learning so that each advocate continuously improves the quality of the advocacy services he/she delivers to DVA clients. A CoP may operate face-to-face or virtually.

Invitation

ATDP is now inviting Veteran Centres, ESOs and other organisations to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI). An EOI must be submitted electronically to ATDPENQUIRIES@dva.gov.au no later than xx xxxx 2016.

To be considered, an EOI must address the following matters:

- Name, address and contact person of the proposing organisation.
- Names, TIP training course(s) completed and completion dates for each advocate.
- Whether on-the-job training and/or mentoring is already being provided.
- If so, the provider’s name, location, TIP training course(s) and completion dates.
- If not, but a mentor/OJT provider has been identified, the future provider’s name, location, TIP training course(s) and completion dates.
- Means of operation (face-to-face/virtual), available amenities (if face-to-face).
- Intended hours of operation.
- Nature of administrative support that would be made available.
- Nature and cost of any DVA support needed to establish the CoP (Please check the BEST grant eligibility criteria at):
INDICATIVE LIST OF ESO, AND WEB AND FACEBOOK SITES

Advocacy Groups:
Australian Veterans Law Advocacy Network (AVLAN): Members Only
Austvet Law: https://www.facebook.com/Austvetlaw
Association of Ex-Service Advocates Australia: Members Only
ASAC Australia: www.asacaustralia.com/assistance/list-of-advocates

Veterans Centres:
RSL NSW Welfare and Pensions Forum: Members Only
Peninsula Young Veterans Wellbeing Centre: https://www.facebook.com/Peninsula-Young-Veterans-Wellbeing-Centre-Incorporated-467759109963495/
RSL Veterans Centre East Sydney: www.rslveteranscentre.org/
Veterans Centre Sydney Norther Beaches (Manager): benw@vcsnb.org.au
Veterans Centre Mid North Coast: www.vcmnc.org.au/
Central Coast and Hunter Veterans Support Group: Members Only

Younger Veterans Sites:
Women Veterans Network Australia: https://www.facebook.com/womensveteransassn/
Soldier On: https://www.soldieron.org.au/
Mates4Mates: https://www.facebook.com/Mates4Mates/
Australian Gulf War Veterans: https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=australian%20gulf%20war%20veterans

DVA Claims, Cards & Payments Veterans Information Group: Members Only
DVA Gold Card Benefits:
Australian Defence Force & Veterans Alliance Forum: Closed Group
Australian Military Aviation Toxic Exposure: Closed Group
Australian Veterans Suicide Register:  
https://www.facebook.com/AustralianVeteransSuicideRegister/  

Aussie Vets PTSD: Community Group

Wounded Heroes Australia: https://www.facebook.com/WoundedHeroesAustralia/  

Peer2Peer Program: https://www.facebook.com/Peer2Peer-Program-1486938261594164/  

Invisible Wounds Australia: https://www.facebook.com/Invisible-Wounds-1496643463898874/  

PTSD Support and Awareness: https://www.facebook.com/PTSDaware/  