

Veteran Affairs Commission (VAC)

Executive Summary for August 14, 2025

Qualitative Methods Update

On July 14, 2025, the Veterans Innovation & Insight Forum brought together veterans, service providers, government leaders, and researchers for a full-day event focused on collaborative dialogue and solution-building. The forum centered veteran voices through keynote speakers, skill-building sessions, and structured group discussions.

Among the 19 respondents to the post-event survey:

- 89% reported overall satisfaction
- 95% agreed the forum fostered meaningful dialogue around veterans' needs

Participants praised the opportunity to engage diverse perspectives and the interactive structure. Suggestions for improvement included a shorter format, more cross-group exchange, and access to the agenda in advance.

All event components were completed as planned. Post-event, the team is analyzing the data using qualitative research methods, including primary and first-cycle coding techniques. These methods support the development and refinement of a qualitative codebook that structures how participant input is categorized and interpreted. The goal of this process is to surface emergent themes that reflect the perspectives and experiences shared during the forum. Financial reconciliation is underway in collaboration with SMU Grants, with contract updates to support student and staff compensation. Reimbursements and reporting are on track for completion by the end of August. All VIIF-designated funds were expended as planned to support the successful execution of the event.

We shared a participant list with Commissioner Cole that includes names, affiliations, contact information, and attendance details, with the understanding that it will be used for outreach to both attendees and non-attendees. We've asked that the list not be shared widely, as we committed to protecting participant's anonymity. How the information is used for follow-up is at the discretion of Commissioner Cole and the Commission. We also provided an optional message for outreach to those who did not attend, inviting them to email veteranswellness@smu.edu to share their input. The SMU team will follow up with brief questions and incorporate responses into the broader study. We recommend concluding this outreach by late August, prior to the start of qualitative data analysis.

Quantitative Methods Update

The quantitative research team is working to identify where there are gaps in services for veterans in the Dallas area—especially in the areas of education, job training, employment, health care, housing, and transportation.

Continued Progress

- Reviewed 28 city council agendas and 29 meeting videos to find patterns and key service issues
- Created two summary documents and started mapping keywords and topics
- Built a geospatial database using ArcGIS Pro to show what services are available in different parts of Dallas
- Pulling, this month, the U.S. Census, American Community Survey (ACS), and Dallas County Appraisal District (DCAD)
- Began exploring data from MeasuringCommunities.org, with plans to use it in student research this fall
- Switched from expensive cell phone mobility data to analyzing Reddit posts (2020–present) to better understand how veterans talk about service access and local needs
- Digitally scanned and started the process of creating georeferenced participatory mapping data from the information gathered at the VIIF, in order to begin developing a geo-database of community gathered data. When completed this will allow the future data transfer from qualitative to quantitative spatial data, and the first phase of geospatial data integration.

Additionally...

- The project is on track and under budget
- One undergraduate student supported the work this summer; more student and staff involvement are planned for fall
- A possible tool to expand social media data collection (\$200/month) is being considered

All of this is contributing to a detailed, interactive system that will help city leaders and service providers see where veterans are being well-served—and where support may be missing.