

# **ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

## **Part 1: Agency Summary**

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**Agency: Department of Veterans Affairs**

**Mission Statement:**

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs will serve Minnesota Veterans and their dependents in securing those benefits provided by Federal and State Laws, and provide advocacy services to veterans to ensure their quality of life.

### **CLAIMS**

To provide quality representation to veterans and their families in their claims for benefits from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

### **FINANCIAL AND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE**

To ensure financial and medical benefits are provided to eligible veterans and their dependents in an efficient and timely manner.

### **GUARDIANSHIP**

To enhance the daily lives, through compassionate financial management of income and assets, of those veterans and their dependents who require court appointed fiduciary service.

### **AGENT ORANGE**

To ensure that information and assistance on Agent Orange issues is provided in a complete and timely manner.

### **VETERANS PREFERENCE**

To ensure that veterans seeking to enforce their rights under the Veterans Preference Act are provided with accurate and timely assistance.

### **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

To ensure financial benefits and services are provided in an efficient, accurate and timely manner within the guidelines of public law and policy and procedures.

### **INFORMATION SYSTEMS**

To ensure the most current information and training is readily available to individuals within the framework of our current computer system. To provide an interface with other state computer systems, and within the guidelines set forth by the Information Policy Council, work toward a more open statewide computer system.

### **PERSONNEL**

To ensure the people of the Department of Veterans Affairs receive quality leadership, adequate compensation, decent working condition, necessary training and education, equal opportunity, and earned recognition. To ensure proper values, involvement, fairness with respect to neutrality are maintained at all times with a perspective that is apolitical and sensitive to both management and employee needs.

### **LEADERSHIP**

To serve as the leader and advocate on all matters directly affecting veterans and their families.

# ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

## Part 2: Program Information

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**Agency:** Department of Veterans Affairs  
**Program:** Benefits and Services

**Program Purpose:** The Department of Veterans Affairs consists of only one program for the purpose of budget documentation but consists of the various management activities. The following problems and public policy issues drive program services and needs:

**\*AGING VETERAN POPULATION:** The number of aging veterans, particularly WWII veterans present increasing demands for health services and federal veterans benefits. This demand is reflected in the growing case load in the Claims Offices and Guardianship Division. This veterans population is on fixed incomes.

**\*FEDERAL ACTION:** Federal actions that affect the ability of the department to service our client population include: Downsizing of active military, restriction of eligibility for federal veterans benefits to include health care and unemployment benefits. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has experienced reduced levels of funding which results in fewer federal veterans benefits.

**\*DEPENDENT POPULATION:** A significant number of clients of the department are dependent upon various government programs at federal, state, and county levels. This dependency is due to a number of factors included limited educational and vocational ability, subsistence level income, which continues to qualify these individuals for various income assistance programs and developmental deficiencies precluding more active employment and vocational possibilities.

**\*GUARDIANSHIP CLIENTS:** This unique group of veterans and their dependent are under court appointed guardianship to the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs. They are dependent due to mental and physical deficiencies, substance abuse, limited educational and vocational capabilities, and low income. In all likelihood these individuals will never be fully functioning, independent members of society and will continue to be dependent upon government services to meet their basic need of life.

**\*NEW CONFLICTS:** As was demonstrated by this nations involvement in Southwest Asia and currently demonstrated by our involvement in Somalia and Haiti, the United States armed forces can become involved in new conflicts. Of the estimated 5,000,000 American military personnel involved in Southwest Asia, numbers are experiencing physical and psychological problems which will require treatment and intervention long into the future. The U S Department of Veterans Affairs has established Persian Gulf registry programs at all 171 medical centers. More than 8,400 veterans have received physicals under these programs. Some of the primary health concerns of these veterans are multiple chemical sensitivities, along with exposure to toxic vehicle paint, exposure to oil well fires, depleted uranium and, possible chemical warfare agents.

**\*NEW VETERANS:** National Guard and Reserve personnel ordered to active federal military service are awarded veterans status by federal action, upon their release from such active duty. Prior to activation, these individuals did not meet the state or federal definitions required for veteran status and consequently were not eligible for state veterans benefits. Former members of the Merchant Marine with ocean going service during WWII have been granted veterans status by federal definition. These individuals are receiving assistance from the department with claims for benefits and services at the state and federal levels. These "new" veterans were not anticipated nor planned for in federal or state budgeting processes.

## **Part 2: Program Information (Cont.)**

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The objectives of the activities listed in the Agency Summary, Mission Statement are further defined as they relate to performance measures below:

The Claims activity provides personal assistance to those individuals (veterans, dependents, and survivors) who are attempting to obtain U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs benefits. In addition, this service also ensures that the client receives maximum benefits entitled under Title 38 U.S. Code.

The Financial and Medical Assistance activity provides a safety net to that portion of the Minnesota veterans population who are temporarily disabled and who have minimal resources to meet emergency situations (i.e. medical emergencies, dental, optical, food orders, subsistence).

The Guardianship activity provides financial and related services to the dependent client; by either personal client contact or contact through intermediaries. This service increases the likelihood that the client who without this service would most likely require some form of institutionalization at increased financial cost to the State of Minnesota. For those clients who do require institutional care, this activity will assist in achieving the highest "quality of life" possible.

The Agent Orange activity provides information to Vietnam Veterans, their dependents, and survivors, regarding the continuing legacy of the ill health effects of the use of this defoliant. Scientific research continues to uncover new health concerns which must be conveyed to this client population.

The Veterans Preference activity provides information and assistance to veterans, their dependents, and the political subdivisions in the State of Minnesota regarding veterans preference rights and obligations as defined by MN Statute 197.46 - 197.481.

The Financial Management activity provides administrative services to all agency functions. These functions include financial transactions through statewide accounting, telecommunications, purchasing, printing, and other related administrative duties.

Information Systems Activity - The activity is central to all department activities. Advances in technology require constant training, monitoring, new equipment, and innovation. This activity leads the agencies long term strategic plan designed to meet the every changing technical advances.

Personnel Activity - This activity provides leadership and direction to all agency personnel in the areas of Affirmative Action, Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity, Americans with Disabilities Act, Labor Contracts, Personnel Law, Veterans Preference and related issues. Due to the complexities of these issues, this activity must adapt to ever arising challenges.

Leadership Activity - This area is responsible for a clientele of 488,000 veterans, and approximately 1,500,000 dependents. This activity coordinates information referral and sharing with collateral agencies as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 87 County Veterans Service Officers and their assistants, Congressionally Chartered Veterans Service Organizations, the Governor's Office, and the State Legislature.

## Part 2: Program Information (Cont.)

### Performance Objectives and Measures:

1. **Claims Activity - Maintain or increase the average amount of compensation and/or pension benefits received by Minnesota veteran households from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.**

Measure: The average amount of compensation and/or pension benefits received by veteran households per federal fiscal year.

	<u>F.Y. 1990</u>	<u>F.Y. 1991</u>	<u>F.Y. 1992</u>	<u>F.Y. 1993</u>		<u>Objectives</u>	
					<u>F.Y. 1994</u>	<u>F.Y. 1995</u>	<u>F.Y. 2000</u>
Actual				\$4000	\$4000	\$4000	\$4000
Prior Objectives	0	0	0	\$4000			

2. **Financial and Medical Assistance - To continue providing subsistence level assistance to individuals seeking long-term financial security and/or returning to gainful employment.**

Measure: Length of time, measured in months, individual clients/families are assisted.

	<u>F.Y. 1990</u>	<u>F.Y. 1991</u>	<u>F.Y. 1992</u>	<u>F.Y. 1993</u>		<u>Objectives</u>	
					<u>F.Y. 1994</u>	<u>F.Y. 1995</u>	<u>F.Y. 2000</u>
Actual	2.90	2.26	2.21	2.22	2.22	2.22	2.20
Prior Objectives	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00			

3. **Guardianship Activity - To determine the cost effectiveness of providing financial guardianship services.**

Measure: Average cost of services provided to guardianship clientele per fiscal year.

	<u>F.Y. 1990</u>	<u>F.Y. 1991</u>	<u>F.Y. 1992</u>	<u>F.Y. 1993</u>		<u>Objectives</u>	
					<u>F.Y. 1994</u>	<u>F.Y. 1995</u>	<u>F.Y. 2000</u>
Actual	0	0	0	\$910	\$900	\$890	\$875
Prior Objectives	0	0	0	0			

4. **Guardianship Activity - To maintain as many dependent clients in a non-institutional setting as medically appropriate.**

Measure: Number of individuals identified that are currently non-institutionalized.

	<u>F.Y. 1990</u>	<u>F.Y. 1991</u>	<u>F.Y. 1992</u>	<u>F.Y. 1993</u>		<u>Objectives</u>	
					<u>F.Y. 1994</u>	<u>F.Y. 1995</u>	<u>F.Y. 2000</u>
Actual	70	73	72	74	74	75	80
Prior Objectives	0	0	0	0			

## Part 2: Program Information (Cont.)

5. Agent Orange Activity - Identify veterans who have diseases or whose deaths have been linked to Agent Orange exposure, and their dependents and survivors. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs continues to establish more diseases (i.e. various cancers, chloracne) that have been attributed to Agent Orange exposure.

Measure: Number of veterans, or dependents and survivors identified and contacted.

	F.Y. 1990	F.Y. 1991	F.Y. 1992	F.Y. 1993	Objectives		
					F.Y. 1994	F.Y. 1995	F.Y. 2000
Actual	0	0	0	10	15	15	15
Prior Objectives	0	0	0	0			

6. Veterans Preference Activity - To provide training to political subdivisions, County Veterans Service Officers, veterans, and their dependents, regarding veterans preference rights and obligations.

Measure: Number of hours spent providing training on veterans preference issues.

	F.Y. 1990	F.Y. 1991	F.Y. 1992	F.Y. 1993	Objectives		
					F.Y. 1994	F.Y. 1995	F.Y. 2000
Actual	100	125	150	150	200	300	300
Prior Objectives	100	125	150	150			

7. Veterans Preference Activity - To reduce the number of Veterans Preferences cases submitted to the Office of Administrative Hearings.

Measure: Number of cases referred.

	F.Y. 1990	F.Y. 1991	F.Y. 1992	F.Y. 1993	Objectives		
					F.Y. 1994	F.Y. 1995	F.Y. 2000
Actual	0	0	78	58	58	55	41
Prior Objectives	0	0	0	0			

8. Financial Management Activity - We will meet or exceed the Governor's prompt payment goal of 98.5% of payments made within 30 days.

Measure: Monthly prompt payment will show percentage of payments within 30 days

	F.Y. 1990	F.Y. 1991	F.Y. 1992	F.Y. 1993	Objectives		
					F.Y. 1994	F.Y. 1995	F.Y. 2000
Actual	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Prior Objectives	98.5%	98.5%	98.5%	98.5%			

9. Leadership Activity - County Veterans Service Officer Operational Improvement Grant applications will be reviewed and responded to in an efficient and timely manner.

Measure: Average number of days for review and response.

	F.Y. 1990	F.Y. 1991	F.Y. 1992	F.Y. 1993	Objectives		
					F.Y. 1994	F.Y. 1995	F.Y. 2000
Actual	0	0	0	0	30	20	15
Prior Objectives	0	0	0	0			

## Part 2: Program Information (Cont.)

10. Information Systems Activity - The information activity will have County Veterans Service Officers on line with both St. Paul Central Office and the Fort Snelling Claims Division to ensure prompt, accurate processing of information and claims for benefits.

Measure: Percentage of 87 County Veterans Service Offices connected to our LAN.

	<u>F.Y. 1990</u>	<u>F.Y. 1991</u>	<u>F.Y. 1992</u>	<u>F.Y. 1993</u>	<u>Objectives</u>		
					<u>F.Y. 1994</u>	<u>F.Y. 1995</u>	<u>F.Y. 2000</u>
Actual	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	10%	50%
Prior Objectives	0%	0%	0%	0%			

11. Information Systems Activity - This activity will coordinate training opportunities for improved computer skills for all agency employees.

Measure: Total number of hours spent on computer training.

	<u>F.Y. 1990</u>	<u>F.Y. 1991</u>	<u>F.Y. 1992</u>	<u>F.Y. 1993</u>	<u>Objectives</u>		
					<u>F.Y. 1994</u>	<u>F.Y. 1995</u>	<u>F.Y. 2000</u>
Actual	200	300	800	800	1664	1664	1664
Prior Objectives	200	300	800	800			

12. Leadership Activity - To improve awareness of state and/or federal benefits the department of Veterans Affairs will create a data base and contact by mail all recently discharged veterans.

Measure: Number of days taken to contact recently discharged veterans.

	<u>F.Y. 1990</u>	<u>F.Y. 1991</u>	<u>F.Y. 1992</u>	<u>F.Y. 1993</u>	<u>Objectives</u>		
					<u>F.Y. 1994</u>	<u>F.Y. 1995</u>	<u>F.Y. 2000</u>
Actual	0	0	0	0	10	6	5
Prior Objectives	0	0	0	0			

# ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

## Part 3: Substantiating the Performance Measures

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**Agency:** Veterans Affairs, Department of  
**Program:** Benefits and Services

**Objective 1.** Claims Activity - Maintain or increase the average amount of compensation and/or pension benefits received by Minnesota veteran households from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Measure:** The average amount of compensation and/or pension benefits received by veteran households per fiscal year.

**Definition:** The objective measures the average yearly federal compensation and/or pension benefit received by households of Minnesota veterans and their dependents during the identified federal fiscal years (10/1-9/30).

**Rationale:** The Department operates its claims offices to assist veterans, their dependents and survivors in obtaining all federal veterans benefits to which they are entitled. We selected this effectiveness measure because these benefits are long term in nature. The federal government provides in excess of 600 million dollars per year in payments directly relating to the veterans of this state. The measure we chose is an accurate reflection of the efforts expended on behalf of recipients of compensation and/or pension benefits.

**Data Source:** USDVA Office of Statistical Research, data is reported yearly.

**Factors Beyond Agency's Control That Affect Performance:** **Congressional Action.** Congress changes health care eligibility guidelines; such as restricting access to health care services, which in turn results in fewer veterans being eligible for treatment. **New Veterans.** Federal action created veterans out of Merchant Marines of WW II - in 1988 they became veterans eligible for health care benefits, compensation, pension, etc. Reserves during Desert Storm. **Healthcare.** New service connection issues - recent changes have resulted in more veterans being eligible for service connection for health problems related to Agent Orange exposure. Health concerns among SW Asia veterans may result in similar issues in the future.

County Veterans Service Officers, other claims offices, USDVA regulations, other agencies, over whom we exercise no control play an integral part in this process. Claims can take up to 9 months before they are adjudicated at the Regional Office and up to 14 months if the claims must be pursued to The Board of Veterans Appeals in Washington.

**Objective 2.** Financial and Medical Assistance - To continue providing subsistence level assistance to individuals seeking long-term financial security and/or returning to gainful employment.

**Measure:** Length of time, measured in months, individual clients/families are assisted prior to achieving long-term financial security and/or return to gainful employment.

**Definition:** This program provides emergency, subsistence level financial assistance to veterans, their dependents and survivors while the veteran either recuperates and returns to employment or becomes eligible for non-departmental long-term assistance such as Social Security, Social Security Disability, USDVA pension, etc. Widows and survivors are assisted until long-term assistance is received or denied. Assistance is limited by state law to 6 months unless recipients are certified ineligible for long-term assistance. This activity provides a "safety net" for those individuals while they are recuperating from an emergency injury and/or trying to obtain long term financial security through other federal programs. These other federal long term assistance programs take numerous months before benefits are received or denied.

**Data Source:** Our data base is currently stored in a System 36 and will be changing to a Local Area Network shortly. The current data base will be merged with the new LAN and updated monthly.

### **Part 3: Substantiating the Performance Measures (Cont.)**

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**Factors Beyond Agency's Control That Affect Performance:** Not all County Veterans Service Officers participate in this program. The County Veterans Service Officers are not state employees and we must rely on them for our major source of referral. Medical data, necessary to support claims for assistance, is many times difficult to obtain. Application times for federal benefits are increasing, which in turn, increases the length of time recipients are assisted by state veterans benefits activities.

**Objective 3.** Guardianship Activity - To determine the cost effectiveness of providing financial guardianship services.

**Measure:** Operating Budget, minus fees generated to State's general fund, divided by number of clients equals Cost Per Client.

**Definition:** Measure the cost effectiveness of providing this service by comparing division cost (appropriated) less fees recovered (5% of some clients' monthly assets) divided by caseload to equal cost per client served.

**Rationale:** Clients of this activity are incapable of responsibly handling their own finances, as determined by the courts, the USDVA, SSA, etc. the activity has full responsibility to expend their funds appropriately while meeting the clients' obligations. This measure will demonstrate the cost effectiveness of the program services.

**Data Source:** Department of Veterans Affairs records and data base, updated monthly.

**Factors Beyond Agency's Control That Affect Performance:** Division is sometimes assigned clients without opportunity to reject them. We get clients that no other agency will take - high service, low income, difficult to deal with - mental health, chemical dependency issues. Required reporting to courts and other agencies takes time and resources.

**Objective 4.** Guardianship Activity - To maintain as many dependent clients in a non-institutional setting as medically appropriate.

**Measure:** Number of individuals identified that are currently non-institutionalized.

**Definition:** Number of individuals being maintained in a non-institutional setting.

**Rationale:** Most everyone connected to human services agrees that "mainstreaming" clients is a laudable goal. It is the department's contention that the client is better served in the community than in an institution. It is also our contention that the costs, to the individual and to the State of Minnesota, are less under our guardianship service. The cost to the state to have the Department of Veterans Affairs maintain these individuals in the community averages \$910.00 per client per year compared to the thousands of dollars it costs the state to maintain an individual in an institutional setting for a year. Some of our clients have families with minor children. None of these families are receiving Aid for Dependent Children due to the careful management of their resources by this agency.

**Data Source:** Activity Social Records, Court documentation.

**Factors Beyond Agency's Control That Affect Performance:** Our clientele is a population that requires frequent intervention due to mental health, chemical dependency, and physical disorders. The department accepts clients that others decline. It is harder to maintain them in the community due to lack of resources and social difficulties.

**Objective 5.** Agent Orange Activity - Identify veterans who have diseases or whose deaths have been linked to Agent Orange exposure, and their dependents and survivors. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs continues to establish more diseases (i.e. various cancers, chloracne) that have been attributed to Agent Orange exposure.

### **Part 3: Substantiating the Performance Measures (Cont.)**

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**Measure:** Number of veterans, or dependents and survivors identified and contacted.

**Definition:** Measure the number of contacts with potential claimants.

**Rationale:** Establish link between cause of death and possible survivors who might be eligible for benefits. One such proven claim can result in hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal veterans benefits, far outweighing the cost of the program.

**Data Source:** Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Health, U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, County Veterans Service Officers, Funeral Homes, Newspapers

**Factors Beyond Agency's Control That Affect Performance:** This activity requires the cooperation of other agencies, which can be difficult to obtain at times. Newly established service connected diseases require that the lists of those veterans known to have been exposed to Agent Orange must be re-examined. Death certificates of veterans must be examined yearly to determine if any deaths are attributable to conditions linked to Agent Orange exposure.

This is a very time consuming process, especially attempting to locate surviving next of kin who might be eligible for federal veterans benefits due to the death of the veteran. The department is attempting to gain access to national statistical data which would make this process easier and quicker; to date this attempt has been unsuccessful.

**Objective 6.** Veterans Preference Activity - To provide information and assistance to political subdivisions, County Veterans Service Officers, veterans, and their dependents.

**Measure:** Number of hours spent providing training on veterans preference issues..

**Definition:** Measure hours of training provided to public, County Veterans Service Officers, veterans groups regarding their rights and obligations.

**Rationale:** The department feels that the educating public on veterans preference issues will result in reduced costs to all parties because veterans will know and demand their rights earlier in the process, do it before a hearing is required. Could also show that not all cases have merit; with improved education these might not be started. Veterans and employers might be able to resolve disputes prior to the hearing process.

**Data Source:** Veterans Preference Officer will maintain a data base of training hours provided.

**Factors Beyond Agency's Control That Affect Performance:** We have no control over the political subdivisions of Minnesota. We have one employee that is a specialist in veteran preference requirements. Coordination of training for all the political subdivisions of Minnesota is difficult for a single individual to accomplish. Frequent changes in personnel at the political subdivisions requires that training be conducted continually.

**Objective 7.** Veterans Preference Activity - To reduce the number of Veterans Preference cases submitted to the Office of Administrative Hearings.

**Measure:** Number of cases referred.

**Definition:** Measure number of cases referred. This is a count of those Veterans Preference petitions filed with the department that are referred for a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge.

**Rationale:** The number of cases referred to the Office of Administrative Hearings might be reduced by educating key personnel in the political subdivisions in Minnesota. We hope to demonstrate that there is a correlation between increased education activity and the reduction in the number of petitions filed.

### **Part 3: Substantiating the Performance Measures (Cont.)**

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**Data Source:** Department and Office of Administrative Hearings records.

**Factors Beyond Agency's Control That Affect Performance:** The department must accept and refer all petitions for relief filed under the Veterans Preference statutes. Although some of these petitions lack merit, the department cannot refuse to assist the veteran.

**Objective 8.** Financial Management Activity - We will meet or exceed the Governor's prompt payment goal of 98.5% of payments made within 30 days.

**Measure:** Monthly prompt payment will show percentage of payments made within 30 days.

**Definition:** Measuring the percentage of all bills which are paid in compliance with SWA 30 day prompt payment guideline. This measure is calculated by the Department of Finance - Statewide Accounting.

**Rationale:** This measure is extremely relevant in providing a measure of the high standard of services this activity provides. Projecting a positive image of fiscal management in this department and the state, as a whole, is very important to this agency.

**Data Source:** Department of Finance - Statewide Accounting report maintained in the agency.

**Factors Beyond Agency's Control That Affect Performance:** none

**Objective 9.** Leadership Activity - County Veterans Service Officer Operational Improvement Grant applications will be reviewed and responded to in a timely and efficient manner.

**Measure:** Average number of days for review and response.

**Definition:** Measure number of days taken to review applications received for the County Veterans Service Officer Operation Improvement Grant. Department rules require that applications be reviewed within 30 days. This department would like to improve on this standard because any reduction in length of time is received positively by our County Veterans Service Officers and their County Boards.

**Rationale:** This program is vital to the operation of the County Veterans Service Officer system, which in turn is vital to the State.

**Data Source:** A coding block to maintain this information will be on the application. Department staff will transfer and maintain this information according to records retention schedules and applicable state statute.

**Factors Beyond Agency's Control That Affect Performance:** none

**Objective 10.** Information Systems Activity - The information systems activity will have County Veterans Service Officers integrated with both St. Paul Central Office and the Fort Snelling Claims Division local area networks to ensure prompt, accurate processing of information and claims for benefits.

**Measure:** Percentage of 87 County Veterans Service Offices connected to our LANS.

**Definition:** Measure the number of County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) tied into the department LAN systems. Currently there are no County Veterans Service Offices connected to either of our local area networks.

**Rationale:** This connection should improve service to the veterans of Minnesota by improving access and retrieval of information. We will use this connection to train County Veterans Service Officers, to share information, and to provide updated information in a timely manner.

### **Part 3: Substantiating the Performance Measures (Cont.)**

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**Data Source:** Department of Veterans Affairs

**Factors Beyond Agency's Control That Affect Performance:** This department cannot require County Veterans Service Officers to purchase equipment necessary to complete this linkage. Education on the value and importance of this connection will be necessary to complete this performance objective.

**Objective 11.** Information Systems Activity - This activity will coordinate training opportunities for improved computer skills for all agency employees.

**Measure:** Total number of hours spent on computer training.

**Definition:** Measure total number of hours of computer training received by department staff.

**Rationale:** Computer literacy is essential to the operation of this agency. With a static operating budget and increased workloads, this agency is relying on computers to improve efficiency.

**Data Source:** Records of computer training will be maintained by the Data Processing Coordinator and compiled into a report on a monthly basis.

**Factors Beyond Agency's Control That Affect Performance:** None.

**Objective 12.** Leadership Activity - To improve awareness of state and/or federal benefits The Department of Veterans Affairs will create a data base of all recently discharged veterans, and will provide them with current information regarding these benefits. Some veterans benefits, such as reemployment rights, education benefits, medical and dental treatment, insurance conversion, etc... must be applied for within established state and federal timelines.

**Measure:** Number of days taken to contact recently discharged veterans.

**Definition:** The department is measuring how quickly information is provided to recently separated veterans so that these veterans maximize potential benefits based on timelines established by state and federal regulations. The department will randomly sample the data base and follow-up with a survey to selected veterans to determine if the information provided was timely and beneficial.

**Rationale:** The department knows that these benefits are important to recently discharged veterans, because if they do not apply within the time frames required, the benefits will be denied. The benefits available are vital to the readjustment and reintegration into society of these veterans.

**Data Source:** The department will create a database file of all veterans who identify the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs as a recipient of their discharge papers. Our data source for this objective will be all discharge records received from all branches of service.

**Factors Beyond Agency's Control That Affect Performance:** Most veterans are reactive rather than proactive when it comes to learning of their benefits. Often times we get requests for assistance in obtaining benefits after the timelines have expired which can reflect poorly on the performance of governmental agencies. There is no requirement that, prior to discharge, veterans designate this agency as the recipient of their discharge.

# ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

## Part 4: Improving Programs and the Reporting Process

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**Agency:** Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

**Process Used:** The management staff of the department met with line staff to prepare a draft of this document. The agency's Mission Statement was used as the basis for the initial discussions, as was information from past and present biennial budget documents, along with known department performance indicators. Management staff then met as a group to discuss the results of the prior meeting and to prepare a draft copy of this report. This draft report was then shared and reviewed with line staff to obtain their comments and input into the final draft report.

The process revealed that in some respects the agency lacks solid, factual information to determine how effective we are at meeting the goals as found in our Mission Statement. The objectives outlined in this performance report should provide, to a large degree, that needed basis in fact to determine effectiveness.

It must be stressed however, that many of the agency's goals and objectives cannot be measured in units of output. The department is a service agency; as such we provide service to eligible veterans, their dependents and survivors, as opposed to producing a product that can be measured in units.

Measuring only the net positive results of our agency's efforts results in an unbalanced view of the time and effort required to arrive at a conclusion. It often times requires as much, if not more, resources of time, knowledge, skills and abilities to pursue a claim that will not be fruitful than a claim that results in a positive outcome.

Any measure of effectiveness and performance must be coupled with the understanding that it is the right of the individual to pursue a claim for benefits with the assistance of this agency. This agency's mission is to provide assistance to the veterans of Minnesota and their dependents and survivors; it is not within our purview to refuse to assist with a claim which might have dubious merit. The right of the individual to pursue a claim with the assistance of this agency is defended at every level of the claims process.

**Ways to Improve Program Outcomes:** The agency will develop specific recommendations for improving program outcomes and effectiveness with its first annual performance report. Program objectives included in this draft report will serve as the basis for evaluation of program effectiveness, although other measures may be developed as the process unfolds.