

990084

# **AGENCY PERFORMANCE REPORT**

**1998**

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

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**AGENCY: VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPT.**

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The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs will serve Minnesota veterans, their dependents and survivors, in securing those benefits provided by Federal and State laws.

**GOALS**

- to provide state soldiers assistance program benefits to eligible veterans, their dependents and survivors.
- to process for payment all eligible bonus claims and maintain and provide veteran discharge records
- to provide state education benefits for eligible state veterans and war orphans
- to provide bronze star grave markers to mark the graves of eligible deceased state veterans
- to provide operational improvement grants to Minnesota county veterans service officers
- to administer an educational and certification program to Minnesota county veterans service officers
- to contract with the Vinland National Center for rehabilitation services for eligible veterans
- to provide representation to veterans, their dependents and survivors in securing federal veterans benefits, as their designated power of attorney
- to provide court/agency appointed fiduciary services to veterans, their dependents and survivors
- to provide information, assistance, referral and counseling services to those veterans exposed to agent orange or other chemical agents or environmental hazards
- to enforce veterans preference statutes
- to coordinate information, referral and sharing of information with collateral agencies
- to develop, operate and maintain the state veterans cemetery

## ORGANIZATION

The department is organized in three program areas: (1) benefits (2) services and; (3) departmental operations. These programs all combine to provide state and federal benefits and services to Minnesota's 444,300 veterans and their eligible dependents. The department was created in 1943 to meet the needs of returning World War II veterans. Since its creation, the department has seen numerous additional generations of veterans.

The department maintains a close working relationship with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, (USDVA) the federal agency which is responsible for providing veterans benefits and services which flow from service in the armed forces of the United States. These benefits are received in a variety of forms, primarily in the areas of health care, educational benefits, home loans and financial compensation and pension benefits. The department's two claims offices, located in Fargo and Fort Snelling, represent 105,323 persons in their claims for federal veterans benefits. Minnesota veterans are served by six USDVA health care facilities located within the state and immediately adjacent thereto. During the last federal fiscal year, the total amount of federal veterans benefits received by Minnesota veterans and their families was in excess of 750 million dollars.

The department also works closely with the men and women who comprise the Minnesota County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) system. The 116 CVSOs and assistants, who are employed by each of Minnesota's 87 counties, are the primary point of contact for veterans and their dependents seeking veterans benefits and services. This local source of personal assistance ensures that veterans are fully informed of and assisted with applications for veterans benefits and services. The department fosters and maintains this relationship through personal contacts, training and educational conferences, seminars and meetings. The department also administers a certification process for CVSOs to ensure that they meet and maintain minimal educational and training standards required to adequately assist in the applications process. This application process will be enhanced through the development of a computer network between all functions of the department and the CVSO system. Funding for this program has been made available through the County Veterans Service Officer Operational Improvement Grant Program. This grant program was established by the Legislature to assist CVSOs in modernizing and improving the technology in their offices.

State veterans benefits administered by the department include; State Soldiers Assistance Program, provision of bronze star grave markers to mark the graves of deceased veterans buried in Minnesota, processing of applications for Persian Gulf Bonuses, provision of educational benefits to veterans and war orphans, maintenance of veterans discharge records, which are required to establish eligibility for veterans benefits, and rehabilitation services to veterans through a contract with the Vinland National Center. Other state benefits administered by the department include providing information, referral and assistance to veterans and their

dependents regarding the long term health effects of Agent Orange, and enforcement of those state statutes governing veterans preference.

Since receiving the state veterans cemetery, by act of the Legislature in 1994, the department has applied for and received a federal construction grant. This grant has allowed the department to construct a maintenance/storage facility, fence the property, develop roadways and irrigate current burial sections.

## AGENCY EXPENDITURE SUMMARY

F. Y. 1998

NAME	(In thousands \$)	% of \$	FTE	% of FT
AGENCY: VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPT	\$5,207	100.0%	41	100.0%
PROGRAM: BENEFITS	\$1,739	33%	10	24%
PROGRAM: SERVICES	\$2,395	46%	15	37%
PROGRAM: DEPARTMENTAL OPERATIONS	\$1,073	21%	16	39%

PERSIAN GULF BONUS- For purposes of comparison with the 1996 report, the Persian Gulf Bonus Activity (a one-time appropriation) has been separated from this report.

## PROGRAM: BENEFITS

Activity:	Persian Gulf Bonus	\$5,782	4
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**Agency** : VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPT

**Program** : BENEFITS

**EXPENDITURES AND STAFFING:**

	<u>(\$ in Thousands)</u>	<u>Percent of Department</u>
Total Expenditure	\$1,739	33%
General	\$1,739	
 Number of FTE Staff	 10	 24%

**GOAL:**

-to provide State Soldiers Assistance Program benefits to eligible veterans, their dependents and survivors. (MS 197.03)

-to process for payment all eligible bonus claims and maintain and provide veteran discharge records (MS 197.455)

**DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES:**

The state benefits program exists to aid and assist Minnesota veterans and/or their dependents in securing subsistence, emergency medical, optical and dental benefits under the State Soldier's Assistance Program. Subsistence benefits provide the veteran with financial assistance to meet the daily needs of living during a short (six months or less) period of disability while the applicant cannot pursue his/her normal occupation. All applicants must meet stringent income and asset guidelines, as established in department rules governing this program.

In FY 98 the department provided a grant to the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV) to provide services to homeless and near homeless veterans. This grant is intended to allow MACV to provide a full range of comprehensive services to homeless veterans, which enable them to reintegrate themselves into society, as well as providing emergency services to veterans who are in danger of becoming homeless. Some types of the services provided include: drug and alcohol treatment, assisted living, independent living in a structured environment, assistance with transportation as well as education and retraining programs.

Other activities in the state benefits program which are very important to the veterans and family members served, but which are small in size and have static funding levels are:

Veterans Rehabilitation (Vinland)  
Benefits Administration  
Veteran/War Orphan Education  
Agent Information and Referral

**PROGRAM DRIVERS:**

**FEDERAL ACTION.** Federal actions that affect the ability of the department to service our client population include: downsizing of the active military, restrictions upon eligibility for federal veterans benefits, to include health care and unemployment benefits. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs has experienced reduced levels of funding, which results in fewer federal veterans benefits being made available and consequently, fewer federal veterans benefits are granted.

Budget reductions on the federal level have resulted in fewer staff to process claims, which has increased the amount of time it takes to process claims and has also increased the amount of time it takes for claimants to receive benefits. Eligibility restrictions have resulted in fewer veterans being admitted to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs medical Center system. Veterans denied care in federal health care facilities are forced to seek care from private providers. These veterans then turn to the department for assistance with payment of these bills.

**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 such as: physical disability, limited educational and vocational skills and subsistence level income, which continues to qualify these individuals for various income assistance programs.

**NEW CONFLICTS:** Southwest Asia (Persian Gulf War). Some of the Minnesota military personnel involved in Southwest Asia are experiencing physical and psychological problems which will require treatment and intervention long into the future. The primary health concerns of these veterans are multiple chemical sensitivities, exposure to toxic vehicle paint, exposure to oil well fire residue, depleted uranium, and possible chemical warfare agents. Minnesotans continue to serve in the Southwest Asia theater.

**Goal 1** : to provide State Soldiers Assistance Program benefits to eligible veterans, their dependents and survivors.

**Objective 1** : to increase the percentage, of County Veterans Service Officers who, when surveyed, answer that they strongly agree or agree that this program returns phone calls in a timely manner by 5% a year.

**Measure 1** : Percentage of County Veterans Service Officers satisfied with the timeliness of returned phone calls

	<u>F.Y.1995</u>	<u>F.Y.1996</u>	<u>F.Y.1997</u>	<u>F.Y.1998</u>	<u>F.Y.1999</u>	<u>F.Y. 2000</u>
<b>Percentage of Satisfaction</b>						
<b>Actual</b>	48%	48%	50%	55%		
<b>Target</b>			53%	58%	63%	68%

#### DEFINITION:

The provision of benefits to veterans requires many phone calls to County Veterans Service Officers during the development of a case.

#### DATA SOURCE:

A survey was commissioned by the department and completed by the University of Minnesota's Center for Survey Research. This survey will serve as the base line to measure improvement in satisfaction in this area.

In 1998, the department surveyed Minnesota's County Veterans Service Officers on this objective, utilizing the same format developed in the 1995 survey developed by the University of Minnesota Center for Survey Research. While the target goal of 58% agreement with the objective was not met, substantial improvement was noted over the previous survey. Renewed efforts will be undertaken in an effort to meet the stated goal.

#### DISCUSSION OF PAST PERFORMANCE:

The University's survey reported that 48% of respondents agreed with the statement that telephone calls were returned promptly. We believe the number of respondents reporting they strongly agree or agree with this statement can be improved 5% a year.

#### PLAN TO ACHIEVE TARGETS:

Telephone logs will be maintained by division employees having the voice mail feature. Current policies and procedures will be reviewed with division employees and redrafted if necessary. Management will review telephone logs and voice mail messages to ensure all efforts are being taken to meet this objective.

Follow up surveys will be completed by the department on a regular basis.



**OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE:**

Changes in federal regulations can quickly increase the demand for services in this division. The elimination or reduction of current service levels often results in numerous additional calls or personal visits to this division. The small number of staff available also can affect performance in this area if prolonged absences occur.

**Goal 1** : to provide State Soldiers Assistance Program benefits to eligible veterans, their dependents and survivors.

**Objective 2** : to process 97% of complete State Soldier's Assistance Benefits applications for financial assistance within 48 hours of receipt of a completed application.

**Measure 1** : % of applications processed that meet this standard.

	<u>F.Y.1995</u>	<u>F.Y.1996</u>	<u>F.Y.1997</u>	<u>F.Y.1998</u>	<u>F.Y.1999</u>	<u>F.Y. 2000</u>
<b>Percentage of Satisfaction</b>						
<b>Actual</b>	95%	96%	97%	98%		
<b>Target</b>	97%	97%	97%	97%	97%	97%

#### DEFINITION:

An application which has all information required to award a claim for benefits will be processed within 48 hours of receipt.

#### RATIONALE:

This measurement demonstrates the amount of time it takes this program to process a complete application for State Soldiers Assistance Program benefits. These applications are completed by a County Veterans Service Officer and the veteran or dependent of a veteran seeking assistance. Benefits provided are in the form of direct financial assistance with meeting the basic needs of life, such as food, shelter and utilities. A complete application is defined as an application with all required supporting documentation necessary to make a decision to grant or deny the application.

#### DATA SOURCE:

The data source will be the results of a case management review of financial assistance cases, performed by management personnel. The results of this review will be used to measure performance.

#### DISCUSSION OF PAST PERFORMANCE:

The department has attempted to provide direct financial assistance to eligible veterans and their dependents in a timely manner.

**PLAN TO ACHIEVE TARGETS:**

The case management review will provide substantiating information regarding the performance of the division. The department will increase training opportunities for County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) to increase the number of applications that are complete when received. Additionally, the department will streamline the application process by simplifying forms, making them easier to complete. We will continue to work with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and other medical providers to decrease the amount of time required to obtain supporting medical documentation, a requirement for obtaining benefits.

**OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE:**

Limited staffing available in small agencies such as ours restricts the ability of the department to meet this objective.

**Goal 2** : to process for payment all eligible Persian Gulf bonus claims and provide veterans with discharge records.

**Objective 1** : to accurately process for payment eligible, completed bonus applications within two weeks of receipt by the Bonus Division.

**Measure 1** : % of complete, eligible bonus applications which are processed for payment within two weeks of receipt.

	<u>F.Y.1998</u>	<u>F.Y.1999</u>	
<b>Actual</b>	*	100%	<b>(Estimated)</b>
<b>Target</b>	90%	90%	

\* During the initial several months of the bonus processing period, the actual number of bonus payments authorized during the two week target is not known. Due to the start up of a new program, with new staff and the onslaught of thousands of applications received in the first few months, the target was not met. Currently the department is authorizing payments of complete, eligible applications within the two week period.

**Agency** : VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPT.

**Program** : SERVICES

**EXPENDITURES AND STAFFING:**

	(\$ in Thousands)	Percent of Department
Total Expenditure	\$2,395	46%
From Agency Funds	\$1,721	
General	\$674	
Number of FTE Staff	15	37%

**GOALS:**

- to provide representation to veterans, their dependents and survivors in securing federal veterans benefits. (MS 197.605 subd.9)

-to provide court/agency appointed fiduciary services to veterans, their dependents and survivors (MS 197.605 subd. 8)

**DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES**

The department provides accredited representation before the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) adjudication division to ensure veterans and their dependents obtain the full measure of federal veterans benefits to which they are entitled. Those cases which are not resolved in favor of the claimant at the local level are appealed to the Board of Veterans Appeals. If not successful at this level, claims may be pursued to the Court of Veterans Appeals, which is located in Washington, DC. An equal amount of time is expended upon cases which ultimately result in the denial of the benefit sought. However, the department feels strongly that all veterans claims for benefits, whether likely of a successful outcome or not, should be pursued if the veteran so chooses.

The Commissioner is appointed as the financial guardian/conservator of incompetent veterans and their dependents by the Probate Court System, United States Department of Veterans Affairs and/or Social Security Administration. The guardianship activity provides complete and comprehensive financial management of income and assets, to include receipt, investment and expenditure of client funds. Services are supervised by the district court having jurisdiction over the guardianship. The court requires an annual accounting of all assets and expenditures. In many cases, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs also reviews all activities related to guardianship.

Other activities in the Services program which are important to the veterans and family members served, but are small in size and/or have static funding levels are:

Guardianship Administration  
 Claims - Fargo Administration  
 Claims - Fort Snelling Administration  
 Guardianship Client Accounts  
 Bronze Star Grave Markers

**Goal 1** : to provide representation to veterans, their dependents and survivors in securing federal veterans benefits.

**Objective 1** : to maintain the current ratio of powers of attorney held by the claims offices, as a percentage of the total state veterans population.

**Measure 1** : The percentage of persons represented by Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs will equal or exceed 22% of the total veteran population in Minnesota.

	<u>F.Y.1995</u>	<u>F.Y.1996</u>	<u>F.Y.1997</u>	<u>F.Y.1998</u>	<u>F.Y.1999</u>	<u>F.Y.2000</u>
<b>Total Veterans in State</b>						
<b>Actual</b>	464,900	461,900	450,900	444,300		
<b>Total represented by Mn DVA</b>						
<b>Actual</b>	102,238	105,323	*	*		
<b>Performance ratio - %</b>						
<b>Actual</b>	22%	23%				
<b>Target</b>	22%	22%	22%	22%	22%	22%

\* Upgraded software did not have the capability to retrieve this information.

#### DEFINITION:

The claims offices exist to help veterans and their dependents obtain benefits from the USDVA.

A power of attorney is a USDVA form, signed by a claimant, which gives the MN DVA claims offices the authority to represent that claimant in his or her claim for benefits from the USDVA.

#### RATIONALE:

The rationale for using this objective measure is that it gives the Department accurate data about the numbers of people served by its Claims Division. This will allow the Department to monitor staffing levels as the total veteran population decreases.

#### DATA SOURCE:

The data is obtained from two sources. The first source is an annual USDVA report called the "Veteran Population Estimates by State, Age and Period of Service". It lists the current number of veterans living in the state of Minnesota as of July 1<sup>st</sup> of each year. This report is published about six to eight months after the July date of the report.

The second source of data is from the two claims offices' database program called the Veterans Information Management System (VIMS). It took until December 1995 to enter and update all the necessary data so that valid reports could be generated. At that time the claims offices had a highly accurate source of information about the clients they serve. This figure includes dependents represented by the claims office.

**DISCUSSION OF PAST PERFORMANCE:**

Prior to December 1995, the department had no accurate measurement of the actual number of people served by the claims offices. The USDVA annual report has been received each year, but the department could only estimate what percentage of those people were served by the claims offices.

**PLAN TO ACHIEVE TARGETS:**

The Claims offices will track all powers of attorney assigned to the claims offices using the VIMS program. This figure will be compared to the total number of veterans in the state of Minnesota as reported by the USDVA. The ratio of powers of attorney to the state's veteran population will be calculated and expressed as a percentage. This figure will be calculated when the USDVA releases its annual report, usually in late December of each year.

**OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE:**

**DECREASING VETERAN POPULATION:** While new categories of veterans are created, such as those from Southwest Asia, the total number of veterans continues to decline both in Minnesota and the nation. This is primarily due to the advancing death rate among veterans. A down sized military means fewer "new" veterans are being created.

Initially it would appear that our claims divisions' workloads would be decreasing. However, as the average age of our veteran population increases, the claims offices face increased demands for benefits and services from older, sicker veterans. This trend is expected to continue.

**FEDERAL ACTIONS:** The USDVA has restricted access to health care benefits and other services. Therefore, many older veterans are now attempting to establish eligibility for service connection many years after their service.

- Goal 1** : to provide representation to veterans, their dependents and survivors in securing federal veterans benefits.
- Objective 2** : to maintain the current amount of United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) compensation and pension dollars received by the people represented by the claims offices expressed as a percentage of the total USDVA compensation and pension dollars coming into the State of Minnesota.

**Measure 1**

:

The ratio of United States Department of Veterans Administration dollars paid to Minnesota residents will equal or exceed 41% of the total represented by the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs.

	<u>F.Y.1995</u>	<u>F.Y.1996</u>	<u>F.Y.1997</u>	<u>F.Y.1998</u>	<u>F.Y.1999</u>	<u>F.Y.2000</u>
<b>VA \$ to MN residents (Numbers In Thousands)</b>						
Actual	\$254,371	\$272,212	\$278,924	\$271,870		
<b>VA \$ to MN residents represented by Mn DVA Claims Offices</b>						
Actual	\$105,272	\$109,266	\$110,771	\$120,435		
<b>Performance Ratio expressed in %</b>						
Actual	41%	40%	40%	44%		
Target	41%	41%	41%	41%	41%	41%

**DEFINITION:**

The Claims Offices exist to help veterans and their dependents get compensation and pension benefits from the USDVA.

**RATIONALE:**

The rationale for using this objective measure is that the amount of money received by the people served by the claims offices is a measurement of the effectiveness of the offices and a reliable indicator of the impact of those offices on the quality of life of the people they serve. Without representation, people often do not know what USDVA benefits they may be eligible for, and they certainly are not aware of how to effectively prepare an appeal for denied benefits.



**DATA SOURCE:**

The data is obtained from two sources. The first source is an annual USDVA report called the "Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures". It lists the total USDVA dollars received by residents of the state of Minnesota in five areas, one of which is "Compensation and Pension." This is the figure used in this objective. The USDVA's fiscal year runs from October 1 through September 30. This report is often not available until the first of the calendar year following the USDVA fiscal year.

The second source of data is from the two claims offices' database program called the Veterans Information Management System (VIMS). Reports will be generated to coincide with the USDVA fiscal year so that the dollar amounts will be for the same time periods.

**DISCUSSION OF PAST PERFORMANCE:**

Prior to December 1995, the department had no accurate measurement of the actual number of people served by the claims offices. The USDVA annual report has been received each year, but the department could only estimate what percentage of those people were served by the claims offices. Therefore, the performance figures for the objective begin with USDVA fiscal year 95.

**PLAN TO ACHIEVE TARGETS:**

The claims offices will prepare annual reports of the total amount of compensation and pension received by the people they represent. This figure will be compared to the USDVA's report for the comparable period of time. The ratio will be calculated and expressed as a percentage. The calculation will be performed when the USDVA releases its annual report of expenditures.

**OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE:**

**DECREASING VETERAN POPULATION:** While new categories of veterans are created, such as those from Southwest Asia, the total number of veterans continues to decline both in Minnesota and the nation. This is primarily due to the advancing death rate among veterans. A down sized military means fewer "new" veterans are being created.

Initially it would appear that our claims divisions' workloads would be decreasing. However, as the average age of our veteran population increases, the claims offices face increased demands for benefits and services from older, sicker veterans. This trend is expected to continue.

**FEDERAL ACTIONS:** The USDVA has restricted access to health care benefits and other services. Therefore, many older veterans are now attempting to establish eligibility for service connection many years after their service.

**Goal 2** : to provide court/agency appointed fiduciary services to veterans, their dependents and survivors

**Objective 1** : to personally visit with 50% of the guardianship clients annually

**Measure 1** :

Percent of clients visited annually
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	<u>F.Y.1995</u>	<u>F.Y.1996</u>	<u>F.Y.1997</u>	<u>F.Y.1998</u>	<u>F.Y.1999</u>	<u>F.Y. 2000</u>
<b>Actual Performance</b>						
<b>Actual</b>	49%	49%	40%	51%		
<b>Target</b>	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%

#### DEFINITION:

Personal visits with Minnesota clients is defined as: the guardianship staff will meet personally with the individual client, preferably in their homes, at least once during the fiscal year. The visits will review the current role of our guardianship services, determine clients' current well being and give clients an opportunity to address their concerns.

#### RATIONALE:

This personal contact should allow the guardianship division to be better informed of the client's mental and physical health, the client's ability to meet his/her own needs and what if any community involvement is required. This pro active approach should result in an early intervention and possibly prevent the need for emergent intervention, hospitalization, or possible confinement.

#### DATA SOURCE:

These visits will be distinguished from routine client contact (i.e. client stopping in office to pick up checks, visit with staff, etc.), in that this visit will be conducted as an interview and a written report will be made and kept on file. Issues raised or noted will be addressed in the written report. A potential crisis situation will be brought to the attention of the division manager, with appropriate action being taken.

#### DISCUSSION OF PAST PERFORMANCE:

The very nature of being under court appointed Guardianship/Conservatorship indicates that these individuals are vulnerable and at high risk for community intervention, by social services agencies, law enforcement, emergency medical and institutional care. The division staff typically visits clients in response to emergency issues and problems. The division staff feels that a pro active visiting schedule would improve services to the clients and could reduce those incidents that require crisis intervention.

#### PLAN TO ACHIEVE TARGETS:

The division will establish a monthly schedule of personal interviews either at the client's home, in the office or at a designated site. Staff will provide a written report and will address any issues noted. Division staffing and budget will be reviewed and adjusted to meet this objective.

**OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE:**

Geographic factors. A few of the clients prefer a transient life style, which can make personal contact with that client difficult. In addition many clients live outside the Minneapolis\St. Paul metropolitan area. This can impact the division's staff time and budget. Ultimately the personal preference regarding lifestyles and living conditions rests with the individual client, thereby making personal contact sometimes difficult to achieve.

**VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPT****AGENCY PERFORMANCE REPORT****Agency** : VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPT.**Program** : DEPARTMENTAL OPERATIONS

<b>EXPENDITURES AND STAFFING:</b>	<b>(\$ In Thousands)</b>	<b><u>Percent of Department</u></b>
Total Expenditure	\$1,073	21%
General	\$1,073	
Number of FTE Staff:	16	39%

**GOAL:**

-to administer an educational and certification program to Minnesota County Veterans Service Officers (MS 197.609)

**DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES:**

The Departmental Operations Program of the department is responsible for all human resource and Sema4 actions, all Minnesota Accounting and Procurement System (MAPS) transactions, and the Management Information System support for the department's four offices, as well as the County Veterans Service Offices throughout the state. This area also provides the accounting functions for the Guardianship Division through daily processing of client checks, balancing of accounts and monthly bank reconciliation.

The operation program assumed additional responsibilities when the State Veterans Cemetery was created. The department has completed the transfer of the site from the association which conceived and initiated this cemetery. The department has applied for and been awarded a federal grant for continued development of the property. Included in this action were a maintenance building, fencing, final development of the road system and irrigation of current burial areas. The department budget plan allows the cemetery operation to reduce its dependency on contract service providers.

County Veterans Service Officers are certified by the department based upon their attendance at training and educational seminars each year. This certification is not a mandatory process, but has been well accepted in the state. Attainment of certification signifies that the County Veterans Service Officer has met the minimum standards of the department for training and education that year. It also signifies that the officer has taken and passed a mandatory test of their skills.

Increased activities of the other department programs has increased the work load of the financial management function of the department's operational programs. Outside of the department drivers included the new Minnesota Accounting and Procurement System (MAPS) which places demands on the department in all areas of the state wide accounting operations. This will require that the financial management division undergo additional training in the areas of human resource management, processing of transactions and accounting procedures.

**Goal 1** : to administer an educational and certification program to Minnesota County Veterans Service Officers

**Objective 1** : to ensure that 100% Minnesota County Veterans Service Officers meet certification standards annually.

**Measure 1** : Percentage of County Veterans Service Officers that meet the standards required for certification.

	<u>F.Y.1995</u>	<u>F.Y.1996</u>	<u>F.Y.1997</u>	<u>F.Y.1998</u>	<u>F.Y.1999</u>	<u>F.Y. 2000</u>
<b>Percentage meeting standards</b>						
<b>Actual</b>	99%	100%	100%	98%		
<b>Target</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

#### DEFINITION:

There are 116 County Veterans Service Officers and assistants eligible for certification by the department as allowed by Minnesota statute.

#### RATIONALE:

The certification process for Minnesota County Veterans Service Officers has been established under MS 197.605. The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers have established the criteria for Certification. The criteria is based on the attendance at various training programs/conferences designed to keep the CVSO versed in and up to date in veterans laws and benefits. These criteria have been adopted into a policy and procedure for use by the department and the association. The CVSO must earn a minimum number of training points and satisfactorily pass the annual CVSO Test to become certified.

#### DATA SOURCE:

The Department maintains individual records of those earned points and advises each CVSO of their point totals. Certificates are awarded to those CVSO's who meet the established criteria.

Certification is an indication that the CVSO has attended the required number of training programs and has satisfactorily passed the annual CVSO Test. Certification is also required if a CVSO is to be awarded a grant through the Veterans Service Office Grant Program.

#### DISCUSSION OF PAST PERFORMANCE:

Since the certification program was established in 1987, the department has not been able to certify every eligible CVSO annually.

**PLAN TO ACHIEVE TARGETS:**

The Department will continue to meet with The Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers to develop training programs, so that all CVSO's have the opportunity to meet the certification criteria. The department will monitor the individual CVSO point totals and advise each CVSO of their progress. The department will develop additional training opportunities, to ensure there is ample opportunity for CVSOs to earn points and be prepared for the CVSO test.

**OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE:**

Reductions in County budgets can affect the CVSOs ability to attend training sessions.

## **GLOSSARY**

**COUNTY VETERANS  
SERVICE OFFICERS  
(CVSO)**

County employees who assist veterans and their dependents with applications for benefits from various sources (i.e. federal, state, etc.)

**UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF  
VETERANS AFFAIRS  
(USDVA)**

A government agency providing various federal benefits and services.

**VETERANS INFORMATION  
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (VIMS)**

A database program used by the claims offices to enter and update necessary data so reports and other information can be accurately generated.

## **APPENDIX**

### **AGENCY: VETERANS AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF**

#### **AGENCY PLANNING PROCESS**

The development of the 1999 Performance Report began shortly after the 1997 legislative session with a continuing review of those measurements developed in our first reports. This process has included staff at all levels and continued through this date.

The planning process included staff of the department. Staff involved included representatives covered under the Commissioners Plan, AFSCME, MAPE, Middle Management and Confidential Plan bargaining units, as recognized by the Department of Employee Relations. Initial discussions focused on the measurements already developed, our performance in each area and program drivers which affected our success. Additionally, discussions included development of new measurements to be included in this report as well as measurements that could be utilized internally to document performance and assist in future planning.

As discussed in prior reports, the department completed another customer satisfaction survey. This process was completed in late 1998 and has provided the department with significant information from the CVSOs.

#### **CHANGES SINCE 1996 REPORT**

##### **State Veterans Cemetery**

Since the last performance report the department received an increased appropriation for the cemetery operations.

Additional funds have been utilized to purchase new equipment, hire additional staff and improve maintenance of the property. Indicators of performance enhancements include the improvements in grounds maintenance. Prior to the purchase of new equipment and hiring of staff, mowing of the 22 acre property took approximately 10 hours and was contingent upon the availability of a contractor. Currently new staff perform these duties in about 4 hours and can be completed on an as needed basis.

Additional improvements in the landscaping of the property, expansion of irrigation, planting of trees and the regular performance of preventive maintenance on equipment have taken place because of this increased appropriation.

##### **Persian Gulf Bonus Activity**

Bonus payments to veterans who served during the period August 2, 1990 to July 31, 1991 were approved by the Legislature in 1997. The department began accepting applications on November 1, 1997 and since that time has paid approximately 15,000 eligible veterans their bonus.

The initial rush of applications created an anticipated backlog of work. After the first 3 months rush, the department has maintained performance by making bonus payments within 2 weeks of receipt of a complete application. As the workload stabilized reductions in staff levels were made without any corresponding decrease in level of performance.



We continue to advertise in every active duty military and veterans communication network available. This program is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 1999. Legislation has been introduced extending this date two years.

**Agent Orange Search Project**

The Legislature approved additional funding to search for dependents of Vietnam veterans who have passed away due to diseases related to their exposure to Agent Orange while in the military. Primarily, these diseases are lung cancer, lymphomas and non-hodgkins lymphoma. This search includes the cross matching of Vietnam veteran bonus records, records of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and death certificates stored at the Minnesota Department of Health.

Since passage by the legislature 55 families have been identified as a result of the search. These families have received \$1.65 million dollars to date. In addition, these 55 families will be eligible for additional benefits estimated to be approximately \$36,000 per month. Eligible children will also receive payments for their attendance in college.

**Benefits Program**

An additional performance measurement is being developed which will measure the average time it takes to process a payment for eligible veterans in the State Soldiers Assistance activity.