



Strategic Goal Four

Contributing to the Nation's Well-Being

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.1

Emergency Preparedness

Improve the Nation's preparedness for response to war, terrorism, national emergencies, and natural disasters by developing plans and taking actions to ensure continued service to veterans, as well as to support national, state, and local emergency management and homeland security efforts.

Making a Difference for the Veteran

VA: Maintaining Readiness in Case of Emergencies

In May 2008 VA participated in the Federal Executive Branch's National Level Exercise (NLE). The Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness (OSP) coordinated VA's participation in this mandatory multi-phased exercise. All phases of VA's continuity programs were utilized. They included the continuity of government (COG), continuity of operations (COOP), and patient reception operations.

VA's participation in the COG portion of the exercise included the relocation of the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary, as well as other senior leadership to alternate locations. VA's participation at the interagency level involved representation on the National Continuity Team and the National Response Coordination Center, as well as the Department of Homeland Security National Operations Center and the Department of Health and Human Service's Secretary's Operations Center.

VA deployed approximately 140 staff members to its primary COOP site at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center. The Medical Center's top management actively participated by ensuring that the facility could meet the support requirements necessary for the COOP participants to carry out their responsibilities. All phases of COOP operations were tested during this exercise including security, communications, logistics, protocol, documentation, and overall functionality. VA employed new video and audio teleconferencing capabilities, which resulted in greater efficiencies.

Each participating office initiated a complete review of their continuity plans to assess their mission-essential functions, critical systems, and vital records. An evaluation team from the Federal Emergency Management Agency reviewed continuity plans during the exercise. VA's overall evaluation was outstanding.



All phases of COOP operations were tested during this exercise including enhanced communications. New video and audio teleconferencing capabilities were employed that resulted in greater efficiencies.



Significant Trends, Impacts, Use and Verification of FY 2008 Results

Supporting Measure
PERCENT OF VA LEADERSHIP WHO SELF-CERTIFY THEIR TEAMS “READY TO DEPLOY” TO THEIR COOP SITE

Performance Trends		Impact on the Veteran	
		<p>One hundred percent of VA leadership has certified that their respective teams are ready to deploy to their Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) site. However, these organizations still routinely exercise deployment to their COOP site and demonstrate their ability to perform essential functions. In case of a national disaster, veterans can be assured of continuity of operations.</p>	
How VA Leadership Uses Results Data		How VA Verifies Results Data for Accuracy	
<p>VA uses the data to determine the need for additional exercises and leadership training. VA requires its leaders to be cognizant of COOP requirements and to gain hands-on experience.</p>		<p>Attendance is taken at each primary COOP site. The National Level Exercise attendant sheets are then disseminated and display a list of all of the VA leaders along with their primary COOP site location.</p>	

ST = Strategic Target

Additional Performance Information for Strategic Objective 4.1

OIG Major Management Challenges

VA's Office of Inspector General did not identify any major management challenges related to this objective.

GAO High-Risk Areas

- Establishing Appropriate and Effective Information-Sharing Mechanisms to Improve Homeland Security: A Governmentwide High-Risk Area (see page 319 for more details)

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

No PART evaluations have been completed that specifically address this objective.

Program Evaluations

No independent program evaluations have been conducted recently that specifically address this objective.

Other Important Results

The Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness completed construction of the Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF). This facility will enable senior VA leadership to communicate with other Departments/ Agencies using the crisis management systems during emergencies.



With enhanced communications, VA is able to participate immediately in decision-making meetings across the Federal government. This will have a positive impact on VA's ability to respond during crisis.

VA purchased 40 Very Small Aperture Terminals (VSATs), which ensure that VA facilities in areas affected by emergencies are capable of communicating when normal lines of communication are inoperable. These VSATS

can be deployed around the United States wherever an emergency is anticipated. The Department plans to eventually have one VSAT positioned at every VA medical center.

Data Verification and Quality

VA's data quality improvement efforts, including its work on data verification and validation, are described in the Assessment of Data Quality on page 217.

Complete Listing of Measures Supporting Strategic Objective 4.1

Green or G: Target was met or exceeded. **Yellow or Y:** Target was not met, but the deviation was not significant or material. **Red or R:** Target was not met, but the deviation was significant or material.

Strategic Goal/Measure (Key Measures in Bold)	Past Results				FY 2008		Strategic Target	Recap Green 2 Yellow 0 Red 0 <hr/> Total 2
	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	Results	Targets		
Strategic Goal 4: Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.								
Objective 4.1: Improve the Nation's preparedness for response to war, terrorism, national emergencies, and natural disasters by developing plans and taking actions to ensure continued service to veterans, as well as to support national, state, and local emergency management and homeland security efforts.								
Percent of confirmed Successors to the Secretary who attend orientation and/or the annual update (OS&P)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	100% G	95%	100%	
Percent of Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and other key officials who self-certify their teams "ready to deploy" to their COOP site (OS&P)	N/A	85%	85%	90%	100% G	100%	100%	



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.2

Medical Research and Development

Advance VA medical research and develop programs that address veterans' needs – with an emphasis on service-connected injuries and illnesses – and contribute to the Nation's knowledge of disease and disability.

Making a Difference for the Veteran

VA Researchers Find That Flat Abnormal Growths in the Colon May Account for Many Cancers



Dr. Roy M. Soetikno and his team collaborated with Japanese gastroenterologists to develop expertise in detecting flat or depressed lesions in the colon.

A study including more than 1,800 patients at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System suggests that flattish abnormal growths in the colon—considered until recently to be rare in the United States and generally ignored during colonoscopies—are more common than previously thought. In addition, they are nearly 10 times more likely to be cancerous than polyps—the small raised knobs of tissue that often contain or signal cancer and are the main target for detection and removal during colonoscopies.

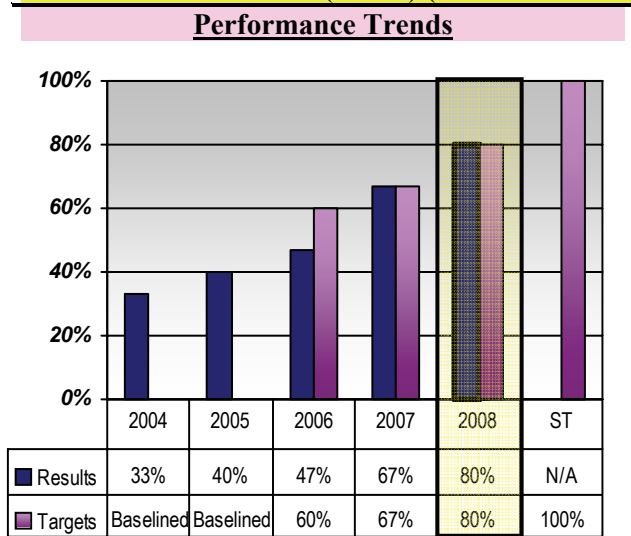
The research was published in the March 2008 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association and was accompanied by an online video showing the VA team's innovative detection methods. Dr. Roy M. Soetikno, the lead author, and his team collaborated with Japanese gastroenterologists to develop expertise in detecting flat or depressed lesions in the colon. The findings are

likely to have an impact on colorectal cancer screening. This article can be accessed via the **Web** at the following address: http://www.research.va.gov/news/research_highlights/cancer-031308.cfm.



Significant Trends, Impacts, Use and Verification of FY 2008 Results

Key Measure						
PROGRESS TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT OF ONE NEW TREATMENT FOR POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD) (FIVE MILESTONES TO BE ACHIEVED OVER 4 YEARS)						
Performance Trends				Impact on the Veteran		
<p>PTSD is an anxiety disorder that can develop after a person has been exposed to a terrifying event or ordeal in which physical harm occurred or was threatened. PTSD related to military service or combat exposure is a major concern in the health of the veteran population. In cases where veterans do not respond to initial treatment, symptoms (including nightmares, disturbing memories during the day, sleep problems, and aggressive behavior) may persist for years. Therefore, effective relief of symptoms is needed. The milestones involve four clinical trials, three of which have been completed. The fourth trial is still ongoing.</p>						
<p>How VA Leadership Uses Results Data</p> <p>Results of PTSD studies are rapidly translated into clinical practice. Findings have been published in the <u>Journal of the American Medical Association</u> and <u>Biological Psychiatry</u>. Results of VA's research has been discussed at conferences with VA, DoD, and university attendees.</p>						
<p>How VA Verifies Results Data for Accuracy</p> <p>Data are analyzed and verified locally by the VA researcher based on milestones achieved and related scientific data. Researcher then forwards summary data to the Office of Research and Development staff in Washington, DC.</p>						



ST = Strategic Target

Additional Performance Information for Strategic Objective 4.2

OIG Major Management Challenges

- Medical Research (see page 272 for more details)

GAO High-Risk Areas

The Government Accountability Office did not identify any high-risk areas related to this objective.

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

In relation to this strategic objective, the Administration conducted a PART evaluation of VA's Medical Research and Development program during CY 2005, which resulted in a rating of "Moderately Effective." Please see OMB PART reviews on page 83 for more information.

Program Evaluations

The National Research Advisory Council (NRAC), a federal advisory committee, completed its annual, independent evaluation in September 2008. The NRAC was instructed to consider the appropriateness of the research to



the VA healthcare mission; the balance of this research in terms of the burden of disease; and the special responsibilities of VA in the areas of mental health, central nervous system injury, and deployment health. As a result of the review, the NRAC gave the VA Research program an evaluation of “fully successful.”

New Policies, Procedures, or Process Improvements

In April 2008, the Office of Research and Development (ORD) announced the establishment of the Cooperative Clinical Trial Award Program. It provides an opportunity for principal proponents to work collaboratively with VA clinical trial and biostatistical experts to develop and complete rigorous interventional research. These clinical trials will determine treatment effectiveness and identify clinical advances that may be implemented in the VA healthcare system.

ORD’s Program for Research Integrity Development & Education has created the VA Central Institutional Review Board (IRB) to facilitate the review of ORD multi-site studies. It reviewed its first protocol in August 2008.

Effective March 26, 2008, Cooperative Research and Development Agreements must be used for industry-sponsored research at all VA medical centers. The use of the new agreements is expected to streamline negotiations with sponsors and make it simpler to launch and conduct trials for promising new drugs and medical devices.

Data Verification and Measure Validation

More details on data verification and quality and measure validation for the key measure that supports this objective are provided in the Key Measures Data Table on page 234.

Complete Listing of Measures Supporting Strategic Objective 4.2

Green or G: Target was met or exceeded. **Yellow or Y:** Target was not met, but the deviation was not significant or material. **Red or R:** Target was not met, but the deviation was significant or material.

Strategic Goal/Measure (Key Measures in Bold)	Past Results				FY 2008		Strategic Target
	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	Results	Targets	

Recap	
Green	2
Yellow	2
Red	0
Total	4

Strategic Goal 4: Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.

Objective 4.2: Advance VA medical research and develop programs that address veterans’ needs – with an emphasis on service-connected injuries and illnesses – and contribute to the Nation’s knowledge of disease and disability.

Progress towards development of one new treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Five milestones to be achieved over 4 years)	33%	40%	47%	67%	80% G	80%	100%
Progress towards development of a standard clinical practice for pressure ulcers (through August) (Six milestones to be achieved over 5 years)	43%	52%	61%	65%	* 68% Y	72%	100%
Progress toward development of robot-assisted treatment/interventions for patients who have suffered neurological injury due to conditions such as spinal cord injury, stroke, multiple sclerosis, and traumatic brain injury (through August) (Twelve milestones to be achieved over 5 years)	11%	21%	43%	54%	* 64% Y	68%	100%
Percentage of study sites that reach 100% of the recruitment target for each year of each clinical study	N/A	29%	40%	35%	38.1% G	38%	50%

* These are partial or estimated data; final data will be published in the FY 2010 Congressional Budget and/or the FY 2009 Performance and Accountability Report.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.3

Academic Partnerships

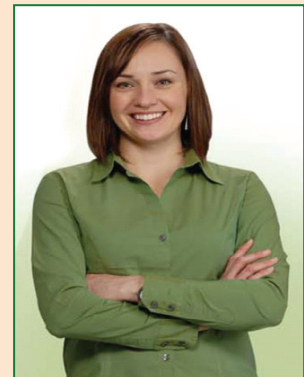
Enhance the quality of care to veterans and provide high-quality educational experiences for health profession trainees, created internally in VA and via partnerships with the academic community.

Making a Difference for the Veteran

Expanding and Strengthening Training Programs for VA Psychologists

To meet increased needs for mental health services for all veterans, including those returning from the Global War on Terror, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is expanding its training programs for psychologists. “Not all the wounds of war are visible,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. “VA is committed to ensuring veterans receive world-class care for mental health services. This initiative meets our short-term needs, but it will also guarantee we have a pool of well-trained psychologists in the future.”

VA, which has more than 11,000 mental health professionals to care for veterans, has hired more than 800 psychologists in the last 3 years. Because psychology is a key part of comprehensive health care, the Department anticipates an ongoing need to employ additional psychologists. The best resource for VA recruitment of psychologists has been the Department’s own training programs. Seventy-three percent of psychologists hired in the past 2 years have had VA training. As a result, VA has worked with its partners among professional schools and universities to increase the number of psychologists who receive training through VA programs each year, beginning with the 2008-2009 training year. The new positions will bring the national number of training positions in psychology to 620 per year.



“Since the day I arrived as an intern, I have been inspired by VA’s commitment to excellence in research and clinical care. I’m so excited to continue my work here as a full-time psychologist. I work with professionals who are at the top of their field, and I look forward to following in their footsteps,” said Shilo Tippet, Ph.D. PTSD Outpatient Clinic.



Significant Trends, Impacts, Use and Verification of FY 2008 Results

Supporting Measure (New)

PERCENT OF VHA HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS WHO HAVE HAD VA TRAINING PRIOR TO EMPLOYMENT

FY 2008 Was a Transition Year

VA is increasing its emphasis on recruiting trainees as part of its succession and workforce planning initiatives. Trainees form an important recruitment pool from which to draw new VA employees. This new measure will evaluate the percent of VHA healthcare professionals who have had VA training prior to employment. The prior measure, “Medical residents’ and other trainees’ scores on a VHA survey assessing their clinical training experience,” was dropped because of stability in satisfaction.

FY 2008 was a baseline year. Results reporting for this new measure will begin in FY 2009.

Additional Performance Information for Strategic Objective 4.3

OIG Major Management Challenges and GAO High-Risk Areas

VA's Office of Inspector General did not identify any major management challenges related to this objective. The Government Accountability Office did not identify any high-risk areas related to this objective.

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

The Administration conducted a PART evaluation of VA's Medical Care program during CY 2003. However, the evaluation did not specifically cover any aspects of the medical education program.

Program Evaluations

No independent program evaluations have been conducted recently that specifically address this objective.

New Policies, Procedures, or Process Improvements

To address a shortage of nurses across the Nation and ensure that veterans continue to receive personalized, world-class care in VA facilities, the Department established the VA Nursing Academy as a 5-year pilot program. The new multi-campus Nursing Academy will

enhance nursing education and practice by the following:

- Expanding teaching faculty in VA facilities and affiliated nursing schools.
- Increasing recruitment of student nurses by increasing exposure to VA.
- Increasing collaboration between VA and selected nursing schools.
- Expanding VA's stipend program for graduate nursing students.

The VA nursing academy is a virtual organization with central administration in Washington and teaching at competitively selected nursing schools across the country who partner with VA.

Despite the nationwide shortage of nurses, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing has reported that more than 40,285 qualified applicants were turned away from nursing schools in 2007 because of insufficient numbers of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, and clinical mentors. VA currently provides clinical education for students from more than 600 nursing schools, but can do more.

The 5-year pilot program is establishing partnerships with 14 nursing schools across the country beginning with 4 for the 2007-2008 academic year, 6 more beginning in the 2008-2009 academic year, and the final 4 beginning in



2009-2010. Accomplishments were evident by the end of the first year. For further details, see Enabling Objective E-1 on page 200.

Further information about the pilot program can be obtained from VA's Office of Academic Affiliations' [Web](#) site at www.va.gov/oa.

Data Verification and Quality

VA's data quality improvement efforts, including its work on data verification and validation, are described in the Assessment of Data Quality on page 217.

Complete Listing of Measures Supporting Strategic Objective 4.3

During FY 2008 there were no results reported for Strategic Objective 4.3 because VA undertook a reassessment of its partnerships with academic institutions with the goal to strengthen these collaborative training and research efforts. As part of this reassessment, the previous measure, "Medical residents' and other trainees' scores on a VHA survey assessing their clinical training experience" that had been in place for several years, has been dropped. A new measure has been developed; results reporting for this measure will begin in FY 2009.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.4

Socioeconomic Well-Being of Veterans

Enhance the socioeconomic well-being of veterans, and thereby the Nation and local communities, through veterans benefits; assistance programs for small, disadvantaged, and veteran-owned businesses; and other community initiatives.

Making a Difference for the Veteran

VA's Veteran-Owned Small Business Verification Program

The VA Center for Veterans Enterprise (CVE) has launched a new program to verify the ownership and control of veteran-owned small businesses (VOSB) and service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses (SDVOSB).



If you own a veteran-owned small business (VOSB) or a service-disabled veteran-owned small business (SDVOSB) and you would like to participate in the Veterans First Contracting Program, register today at www.vetbiz.gov

VOSBs or SDVOSBs wishing to participate in the Veterans First Contracting Program must register in the VetBiz.gov Vendor Information Pages (VIP) Database and submit VA Form 0877, VETBIZ Vendor Information Pages Verification Program. Once verified, businesses will receive official notification, a lapel pin, and a link to download the verification logo for use on their marketing material. Most importantly, these businesses will qualify to participate in contracting and subcontracting opportunities outlined in the law. For more information about the Verification Program, visit the CVE [Web](http://www.vetbiz.gov) site at www.vetbiz.gov or call the CVE at

the toll-free telephone number 1-866-584-2344.

In January 2008, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs established the first-ever procurement goals for SDVOSBs and VOSBs pursuant to P.L. 109-461. These goals, covering Fiscal Years 2008 and 2009, are ambitious in that they increase the SDVOSB goal for VA from the statutory minimum 3 percent to 7 percent, and VA's VOSB goal from 7 percent to 10 percent. These increases will result in increased spending to veteran entrepreneurs, contributing to their economic well-being and that of their local communities, consistent with VA's Strategic Plan and objectives.

THE FOLLOWING EVENTS WERE HELD IN THE SUMMER OF 2008 TO SUPPORT VETERAN-OWNED SMALL BUSINESSES:

- **June 2008:** VA held its 7th Annual Champion of Veterans Enterprise Awards Program ceremony to honor individuals and organizations that put veterans and service-disabled veterans first. The award recognizes veterans whose quality performance provides advocates with specific success stories. This year's awards were presented by the Honorable James B. Peake, M.D., Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
- **June 2008:** VA and the National Veteran-Owned Business Association sponsored the 2nd Annual Veteran-Owned Business Accountability Summit. The conference tracked the progress of Federal agencies' implementation of Executive Order 13360, Providing Opportunities for Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses to increase their contracting and subcontracting in Federal acquisitions.
- **July 2008:** VA and the Veterans Small Business Federal Interagency Council co-sponsored the 4th National Small Business Conference. With a record attendance of more than 1,700 participants, the conference educated VOSBs and SDVOSBs on business development and assisted them in identifying contracting opportunities within the Federal Government. This conference has become the premiere national veterans business conference. In 2009, VA expects over 2,500 participants to attend this conference.



Significant Trends, Impacts, Use and Verification of FY 2008 Results

Supporting Measure																			
PERCENT OF PROCUREMENT OBLIGATIONS AWARDED TO VETERAN-OWNED SMALL BUSINESSES (VOSBs)* AND SERVICE-DISABLED VOSBs (SDVSOBs)																			
Performance Trends	Impact on the Veteran																		
<p style="text-align: center;">Percent of Total VA Procurement Obligations</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Percent of Total VA Procurement Obligations</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>VOSB (%)</th> <th>SDVOSB (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2004</td> <td>1.25</td> <td>1.25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005</td> <td>4.50</td> <td>2.15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006</td> <td>6.17</td> <td>3.56</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2007</td> <td>10.37</td> <td>7.09</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2008</td> <td>15.28</td> <td>12.35</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">◆ VOSB ■ SDVOSB</p> <p><small>Source: Goaling Report, U.S. Small Business Administration</small></p> <p><small>* P.L. 109-461 gave VA unique authority to conduct set-aside and sole source procurement with Veteran-Owned Small Businesses. In January 2008, the Secretary established an FY 2008 performance target and instituted PAR reporting requirements. This measure appears in the PAR for the first time.</small></p> <p><small>(1) Actual data through 09/2008. Data will not be final until 09/2009.</small></p>	Year	VOSB (%)	SDVOSB (%)	2004	1.25	1.25	2005	4.50	2.15	2006	6.17	3.56	2007	10.37	7.09	2008	15.28	12.35	<p>Impact on the Veteran</p> <p>VA continues to be a leader in contracting with VOSBs and SDVSOBs, having exceeded the statutory SDVOSB goal in FY 2007. VA nearly doubled its procurement with VOSBs, from \$616.2 million to over \$1.2 billion. Nearly one-third of all small business dollars spent by VA were with VOSBs, marking the first time expenditures by VA with these firms exceeded \$1 billion. Contracting with veteran entrepreneurs is a logical extension of the VA mission and contributes to the economic strength of this important business community. Increased spending also makes entrepreneurship a viable and attractive career option for America's veterans.</p> <hr/> <p>How VA Leadership Uses Results Data</p> <p>These data assist VA leadership, the Congress, the veteran entrepreneurial community, and other stakeholders in gauging the extent of VA compliance and success in implementing the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999 (P.L. 106-50); the Veterans Benefits, Healthcare and Information Technology Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-461); and Executive Order 13360, <i>Providing Opportunities for Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses to increase their Contracting and Subcontracting</i>, issued in October 2004.</p> <p>The results also help VA program management identify areas for improvement and assist in targeting training and vendor outreach.</p>
Year	VOSB (%)	SDVOSB (%)																	
2004	1.25	1.25																	
2005	4.50	2.15																	
2006	6.17	3.56																	
2007	10.37	7.09																	
2008	15.28	12.35																	
<p>How VA Verifies Results Data for Accuracy</p> <p>Data are analyzed monthly by staff and program managers in the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization. Data collection staff is skilled/trained in the proper procedures for extracting and interpreting data.</p>																			



Additional Performance Information for Strategic Objective 4.4

OIG Major Management Challenges and GAO High-Risk Areas

VA's Office of Inspector General did not identify any major management challenges related to this objective. The Government Accountability Office did not identify any high-risk areas related to this objective.

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

No PART evaluations have been completed that specifically address this objective.

Program Evaluations

No independent program evaluations have been conducted recently that specifically address this objective.

New Policies, Procedures, or Process Improvements

VA implemented Sections 502 and 503 of Public Law (P.L.) 109-461, the Veterans Benefits, Healthcare and Information Technology Act of 2006 (§8127 and §8128 38 U.S.C.), effective June 20, 2007. This program is known in VA as the “Veterans First Contracting Program.” The law establishes a small business program hierarchy within VA that places SDVOSBs and VOSBs first and second, respectively, in VA open market acquisitions. P.L. 109-461 provides VA with unprecedented authorities in contracting with veteran businesses. In addition to authority to set-aside acquisitions for competition exclusively among SDVOSBs, the law also provides VA acquisition professionals with authority to set-aside requirements for VOSBs, and under certain circumstances make sole-source contract awards to SDVOSBs and VOSBs up to \$5 million.

The Department participates extensively in procurement conferences, training sessions, and one-on-one counseling sessions to train small

businesses on VA's acquisition processes, operations, and opportunities. VA continues to make personnel aware of the Department's responsibilities to support small business programs through VA's acquisition training programs.

Other Important Results

VA's Center for Veterans Enterprise (CVE) maintains the VetBiz.Gov (www.vetbiz.gov) Web portal for veterans in business, which is a primary resource for exchanging information with veteran business owners, buyers, large prime contractors, and other stakeholders.

CVE also provides assistance to veteran entrepreneurs seeking to expand an existing business or start a new business. Services available through the CVE include the Vendor Information Pages (VIP) database, verification of veteran business eligibility, business coaching, video marketing, bid matching, market research reports, and topical news and information. CVE connects veterans with community resources who will help them with their business development needs. In June 2008, the Association for Federal Information Resources Management presented CVE with its “Leadership Award in Acquisition and Procurement” for its support of the U.S. General Services Administration's Veterans Technology Services (VETS) Governmentwide Acquisition Contract (GWAC) for service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses.

Data Verification and Quality

VA's data quality improvement efforts, including its work on data verification and validation, are described in the Assessment of Data Quality on page 217.



Complete Listing of Measures Supporting Strategic Objective 4.4

Green or G: Target was met or exceeded. **Yellow or Y:** Target was not met, but the deviation was not significant or material. **Red or R:** Target was not met, but the deviation was significant or material.

Strategic Goal/Measure (Key Measures in Bold)	Past Results				FY 2008		Strategic Target
	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	Results	Targets	

Strategic Goal 4: Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.

Recap	
Green	2
Yellow	0
Red	0
Total	2

Objective 4.4: Enhance the socioeconomic well-being of veterans, and thereby the Nation and local communities, through veterans benefits; assistance programs for small, disadvantaged, and veteran-owned businesses; and other community initiatives.

Attainment of statutory minimum goals for <u>service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses</u> expressed as a percent of total procurement (OSDBU) (through September; data will not be final until 09/2009)	1.25%	2.15%	3.58%	7.09%	* 12.35% G	3.00%	3.00%
Percent of total procurement dollars awarded to <u>veteran-owned small businesses</u> (through September; data will not be final until 09/2009) P.L. 109-461 gave VA unique authority to conduct set-aside and sole source procurement with Veteran-Owned Small Businesses. In January 2008, the Secretary established an FY 2008 performance target and instituted PAR reporting requirements. This measure appears in the PAR for the first time.	N/A	4.50%	6.17%	10.37%	* 15.28% G	10.00%	10.00%

* These are partial or estimated data; final data will be published in the FY 2010 Congressional Budget and/or the FY 2009 Performance and Accountability Report.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.5

Maintaining National Cemeteries as Shrines

Ensure that national cemeteries are maintained as shrines dedicated to preserving our Nation's history, nurturing patriotism, and honoring the service and sacrifice veterans have made.

Making a Difference for the Veteran

Author Honored by VA

On November 6, Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gordon H. Mansfield presented a Commendation Award to Tom Ruck, the author of *Sacred Ground: A Tribute to America's Veterans*, a book highlighting the national cemeteries operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). "Tom Ruck has brought honor and recognition to America's heroes and to VA," said Mansfield. "His respect and admiration for the service and sacrifices of our veterans and their families is reflected on every page of his book."

"I wanted the citizens of this country to realize what beauty and serenity lies within VA's national cemeteries," Ruck said. "Americans need to know how well their veterans are being cared for in these national shrines."

Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the [Web](#) at www.cem.va.gov, or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 1-800-827-1000.



Tom Ruck, the author of *Sacred Ground: A Tribute to America's Veterans*, received a Commendation Award for his book that highlights the national cemeteries operated by VA.



Significant Trends, Impacts, Use and Verification of FY 2008 Results

Key Measure						
PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO RATE NATIONAL CEMETERY APPEARANCE AS EXCELLENT						
Performance Trends				Impact on the Veteran		
<p>National cemeteries carry expectations of appearance that set them apart from private cemeteries. The 2008 score reflects VA's strong commitment to maintaining national cemeteries as national shrines so that bereaved family members are comforted when they come to the cemetery for the interment, or later to visit the grave(s) of their loved one(s).</p> <p>Our Nation's veterans have earned the appreciation and respect not only of their friends and families, but also of the entire country and our allies. VA's cemeteries reflect this appreciation and respect.</p>						
<p>How VA Leadership Uses Results Data</p> <p>NCA's annual Survey of Satisfaction with National Cemeteries is the source of data for this key measure. The survey collects data from family members and funeral directors who have recently received services from a national cemetery. Respondents are asked to rate numerous aspects of cemetery appearance, such as the condition of gravesites, headstones, and markers. These data are shared with NCA managers at Central Office, Memorial Service Networks (MSNs), and national cemeteries who use the data to improve the appearance of national cemeteries.</p>						
<p>How VA Verifies Results Data for Accuracy</p> <p>Data are collected by an independent contractor. The contractor provides detailed written documentation of how the survey methodology delivers an acceptable level of accuracy system-wide and by individual cemetery.</p> <p>Data are accurate at a 95 percent confidence interval at both national and Memorial Service Network (MSN) levels and for cemeteries having at least 400 interments per year.</p>						
<p>ST = Strategic Target</p>						

Additional Performance Information for Strategic Objective 4.5

OIG Major Management Challenges and GAO High-Risk Areas

VA's Office of Inspector General did not identify any major management challenges related to this objective. The Government Accountability Office did not identify any high-risk areas related to this objective.

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

In relation to this strategic objective, the Administration conducted a PART evaluation of VA's Burial program during CY 2002, which resulted in a rating of "Moderately Effective." Please see OMB PART reviews on page 82 for more information.

Program Evaluations

The Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act, Public Law 106-117, directed VA



to contract for an independent study to look at various issues related to the National Shrine Commitment and its focus on cemetery appearance. Volume 3: Cemetery Standards of Appearance was published in March 2002. This report served as a planning tool and reference guide in the task of reviewing and refining VA's operational standards and measures.

In August 2002, Volume 2: National Shrine Commitment was completed. This report identified the one-time repairs needed to ensure a dignified and respectful setting appropriate for each national cemetery. NCA is using the information in this report to address repair and maintenance needs at national cemeteries. Through 2008 NCA has addressed approximately 33 percent of the total repairs identified in this report.

In August 2008, VA completed an independent and comprehensive program evaluation of the full array of burial benefits and services that the Department provides to veterans and their families in accordance with 38 U.S.C. 527. The evaluation was performed by ICF International to provide VA with an objective assessment of the extent to which VA's program of burial benefits has reached its stated goals and the impact that this program has had on the lives of veterans and their families.

The evaluation validated VA's efforts to identify and measure performance in areas key to maintaining national cemeteries as national shrines. The evaluation also recommended improvements to NCA's methods of assessing customer satisfaction to capture the opinions of family members of veterans up to 5 years post-interment and at smaller, national cemeteries that are not actively performing interments.

The findings from this program evaluation will serve to inform and guide VA's management of the burial benefits program, particularly with respect to VA's efforts to maintain national cemeteries as national shrines. The report is

available to the public on the Department of Veterans Affairs [Web](http://www.va.gov/op3/) site at www.va.gov/op3/.

New Policies, Procedures, or Process Improvements

In June 2008, VA completed the establishment of a new NCA Human Resources Center (HRC) to serve the staffing needs of all 131 national cemeteries, 5 Memorial Service Network offices, and the NCA National Training Center. Previously, the human resources needs of NCA field sites were supported by local VHA and VBA servicing stations. Establishment of the HRC has enabled NCA to implement new automated HR procedures and other process improvements that have improved the efficiency and cost effectiveness of NCA's recruitment and workers compensation processes.

NCA is continuing its partnership with the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT), an office of the National Park Service (NPS), to conduct a materials conservation and treatment analysis of government-issued marble veteran headstones issued from the 1870s through 1973. Second to VA, NPS has the largest number of national cemeteries, including Gettysburg National Cemetery, under its jurisdiction. Through an interagency agreement, NCPTT will identify alternatives for cleaning historic headstones based upon criteria such as cost effectiveness and environmentally and historic resource-friendly chemicals.

In 2008, NCA continued the implementation of a new Facility Condition Assessment program as part of its continuing commitment to maintain the appearance of national cemeteries as national shrines. Each national cemetery annually assesses whether the condition of each building and structure at the cemetery is considered acceptable according to system-wide standard definitions within VA and within federal guidelines identified by the Federal Real Property Council. This information is used both to provide additional focus to NCA management on the condition of cemetery facilities and for



the allocation of funds for construction projects. Cemetery facilities are among the most highly visible components of national cemeteries. Maintaining the safety and appearance of cemetery facilities is an important component of maintaining national cemeteries as national shrines.

Other Important Results

The willingness to recommend the national cemetery to veteran families during their time of need is an expression of loyalty toward that national cemetery. In 2008, 98 percent of survey respondents (family members and funeral directors who recently received services from a national cemetery) indicated they would recommend the national cemetery to veteran families in their time of need.

To ensure the appearance of national cemeteries meets the standards our Nation expects of its national shrines, VA performed a wide variety of grounds management functions including raising, realigning, and cleaning headstones to ensure uniform height and spacing and to improve appearance. The rows of pristine, white headstones that are set at the proper height and correct alignment provide the vista that is the hallmark of many VA national cemeteries. In 2008 VA collected data that showed that 65 percent of headstones and/or markers in national cemeteries are at the proper height and alignment; 84 percent of headstones, markers, and niche covers are clean and free of debris or objectionable accumulations; and 86 percent of gravesites in national cemeteries had grades that were level and blended with adjacent grade levels. In 2008 National Shrine Commitment projects were initiated at 31 national cemeteries. These projects will raise, realign, and clean more than 506,000 headstones and markers and renovate gravesites in nearly 500 acres.

While attending to these highly visible aspects of our national shrines, VA also maintained roads, drives, parking lots, and walks; painted buildings, fences, and gates; and repaired roofs, walls, and irrigation and electrical systems.

In 2008, 98 percent of survey respondents (family members and funeral directors combined) agreed that the overall appearance of national cemeteries was excellent. This result demonstrates VA's continued commitment to maintaining national cemeteries as shrines dedicated to preserving our Nation's history, nurturing patriotism, and honoring the service and sacrifice veterans have made.

NCA has an Organizational Assessment and Improvement Program to identify and prioritize improvement opportunities and to enhance program accountability by providing managers and staff at all levels with one "NCA scorecard." As part of the program, assessment teams conduct site visits to all national cemeteries on a rotating basis to validate performance reporting. NCA schedules 12 visits each year to a representative group of national cemeteries from each MSN that illustrates the diversity of our system in terms of age, size, workload, and climate. To date, NCA has completed 45 site visits assessing 80 national cemeteries. Ten visits assessing 21 national cemeteries were conducted in 2008.

VA continued its partnerships with various civic organizations that provide volunteers and other participants to assist in maintaining the appearance of national cemeteries. For example, VA executed an interagency agreement with the Bureau of Prisons provides for the use of selected prisoners to perform work at national cemeteries. Under a joint venture with VHA, national cemeteries provide therapeutic work opportunities to veterans receiving treatment in the Compensated Work Therapy/Veterans Industries program. The national cemeteries are provided a supplemental workforce while giving veterans the opportunity to work for pay, regain lost work habits, and learn new work skills.

Data Verification and Measure Validation

More details on data verification and quality and measure validation for the key measure that supports this objective are provided in the Key Measures Data Table on page 234.



Complete Listing of Measures Supporting Strategic Objective 4.5

Green or G: Target was met or exceeded. **Yellow or Y:** Target was not met, but the deviation was not significant or material. **Red or R:** Target was not met, but the deviation was significant or material.

Strategic Goal/Measure (Key Measures in Bold)	Past Results				FY 2008		Strategic Target
	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	Results	Targets	

Recap	
Green	1
Yellow	4
Red	0
Total	5

Strategic Goal 4: Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.

Objective 4.5: Ensure that national cemeteries are maintained as shrines dedicated to preserving our Nation's history, nurturing patriotism, and honoring the service and sacrifice veterans have made.

Percent of respondents who rate national cemetery appearance as excellent	98%	98%	97%	97%	98% Y	99%	100%
Percent of respondents who would recommend the national cemetery to veteran families during their time of need	97%	98%	98%	98%	98% Y	99%	100%
Percent of headstones and/or markers in national cemeteries that are at the proper height and alignment	64%	70%	67%	69%	65% Y	72%	90%
Percent of headstones, markers, and niche covers that are clean and free of debris or objectionable accumulations	76%	72%	77%	75%	84% G	80%	90%
Percent of gravesites that have grades that are level and blend with adjacent grade levels	79%	84%	86%	83%	86% Y	88%	95%