

Northeast Operations



Crucial Conversation Class



Houston Field Office



St. Louis Office



Centralized Investigation Division Staff in Leavenworth

## Customer Comments

"(OCAP) can give you a road map to success. It also gives you an insight to what your employees are thinking and what THEY BELIEVE."

- VHA Facility Director

"There is a renewed sense of purpose and focus on results and teamwork (since the OCAP review). Work attitudes have changed and business results have dramatically improved."

- VHA Facility Director

"Mediation worked very well for me and has made working with the other individual better."

- Mediation Participant

"(I) found the (mediation) process more helpful than expected. (It) renewed lines of communication."

- Mediation Participant

## OUR VISION

*VA is recognized as the leader in promoting a discrimination-free environment for those who serve our Nation's veterans*

## CONTACT US

### HEADQUARTERS

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## FIELD OFFICES

**Western Operations** - Los Angeles, CA (310) 268-3586  
Satellite Offices: Long Beach, CA; Palo Alto, CA; Vancouver, WA

**Central Plains Operations** - Houston, TX (713) 794-7066  
Satellite Offices: Leavenworth, KS; St. Louis, MO

**Mid-South Operations** - Little Rock, AR  
(501) 257-1601

**Great Lakes Operations** - Cleveland, OH (440) 717-2856  
Satellite Offices: Hines, IL; Detroit, MI

**Northeastern Operations** - Lyons, NJ (908) 604-5349  
Satellite Offices: New York, NY; Bedford, MA

**Mid-Atlantic Operations** - Washington, DC  
(202) 501-2787

**Southeastern Operations** - Bay Pines, FL  
(727) 319-1165  
Satellite Office: Lake City, FL



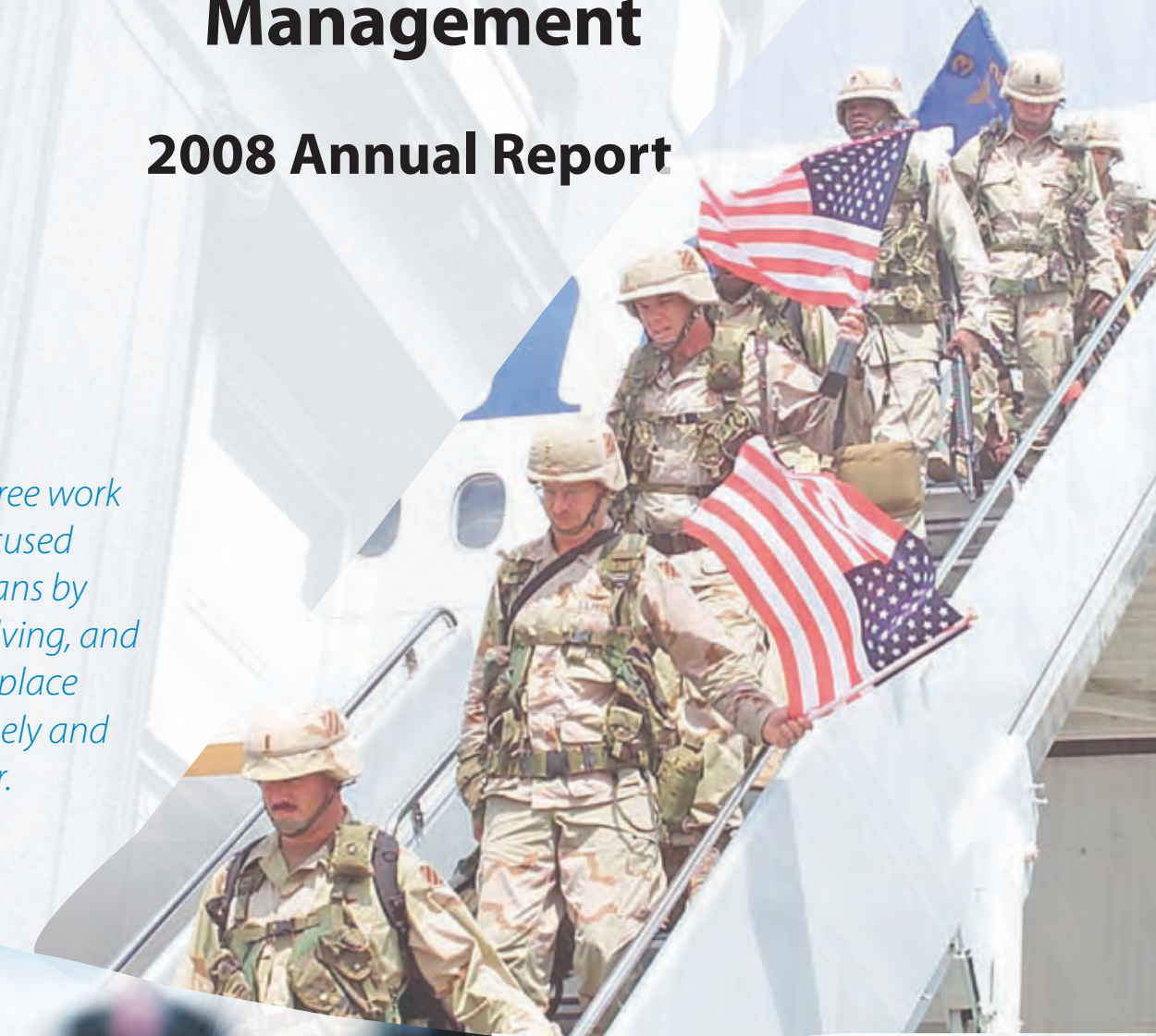
## Office of Resolution Management

### 2008 Annual Report



### MISSION:

*To promote a discrimination-free work environment focused on serving veterans by preventing, resolving, and processing workplace disputes in a timely and effective manner.*



# FROM THE DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY



Two years ago, the Office of Resolution Management (ORM) embarked on a process of transformation, moving from a focus on processing Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaints to resolving disputes as early as possible. Our 2006 Strategic Plan laid the groundwork for this change. With the dedication displayed by our employees and with the continued support of our stakeholders, we are striding confidently toward our goals of improved efficiency and effectiveness, better customer service, a "One ORM" organizational culture, and greater use of Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) for EEO complaints and workplace disputes.

Our emphasis on resolving disputes results in a number of important benefits. First, it reduces costs. The cost of handling an EEO case can range from \$7,500

up to \$60,000. By comparison, the cost of resolving a dispute using ADR approaches such as mediation is generally between \$300 and \$500. Another important benefit of ADR is the improved atmosphere in the work environment which results when solutions to conflicts are quickly found. All parties to the dispute can then devote full attention to their work and avoid the prolonged disruption that may result from conflicts which may take many months to resolve through the EEO complaint process.

Our dispute resolution outreach efforts are producing promising results throughout the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Since 2006 when ORM's strategic plan was initiated, the number of informal EEO complaints in which ADR is used has more than doubled, and those resolved have increased nearly two and a half times in that same period. In addition, our ADR resolution rate remains higher than the government-wide average of 50%. Our average processing time for formal complaints improved 14% and is now within our 180-day processing time goals in accordance with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) regulations.

This coming year one of our main objectives is to complete the realignment process we began in 2007. Streamlining our management structure will result in a more effective span of control and will assist us in moving forward with the improvements outlined in our Strategic Plan. We will also continue to count on the support of our managers, supervisors, and employees throughout the Department to help us promote VA's goal of a discrimination-free work environment. We are always mindful that our efforts toward this end will help everyone within the Department to better serve our ultimate customers—the Nation's veterans and their families.

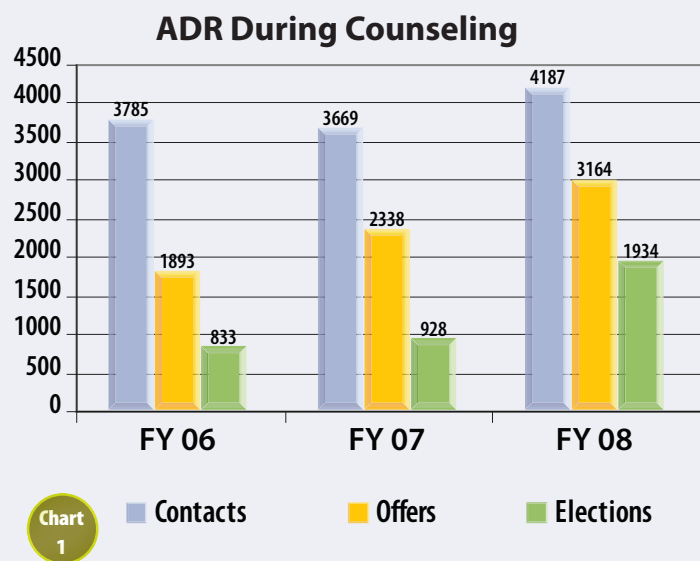
Rafael A. Torres

## I. PREVENTION

ORM wants to insure that VA's employees and managers understand the characteristics of a healthy work environment and have the tools to address workplace disputes. The **Organizational Climate Assessment Program (OCAP)** is one way ORM addresses this charge. OCAP provides VA's facility managers with an analysis of their workplace environment, focusing on employee attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about their physical environment, their work relationships, and their motivation. The program includes analysis of data and surveys, on-site interviews, and employee and management focus group discussions with follow-up activities for the next twelve months.

During this past year, the OCAP process was completely revamped and new standard operating procedures were developed. Five OCAP assessments were conducted under these new procedures this past year. Feedback from facility directors has been consistently positive.

ORM also provides comparative **Trend Data** of VA's EEO complaint activity, broken down to the facility level, to all Administrations on a semi-annual basis. The trend data provide managers with information to help compare their facility's EEO complaint activity with other facilities. This past year, a new feature was added to enhance the comparability of informal and formal filing rates. These per capita filing rates disclose a declining trend in both informal and formal complaint filings over the past four years.



## II. EARLY RESOLUTION

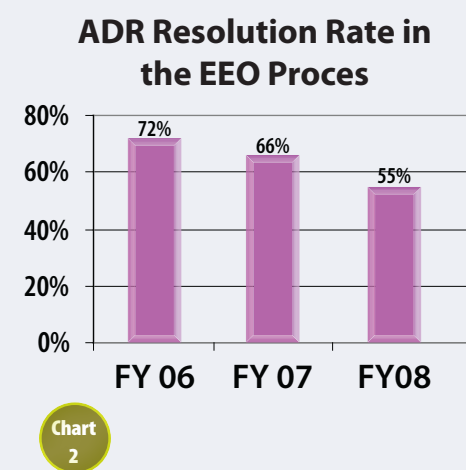
VA's Workplace Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Program offers employees and managers tools to work through differences and disagreements that can negatively impact the work environment. ADR uses mediation and facilitation techniques to open lines of communication and promote joint problem solving. When used before a complaint, grievance, or appeal is filed, ADR is 80% effective in resolving the dispute; it also saves significant time and resources.



Over the last two years, the Workplace ADR Program Team has been working diligently to incorporate ADR into VA's EEO process, obtaining Memoranda of Understanding between ORM and other VA organizations to facilitate this. The result is that since 2006, VA's ADR offer rate has risen from 45% to 76% in 2008, which is above the threshold recommended by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (see Chart 1).

More importantly, VA's ADR participation rate more than doubled over the last two years (from 22% to 46%), reflecting the increase in offer rates and our education and training efforts (Chart 1).

As more complaints entered the ADR process, resolution rates declined slightly. It is likely that more difficult cases are being mediated, accounting for this decline (Chart 2). It is important to note, however, that VA's ADR resolution rate remains higher than the government-wide average of 50%.

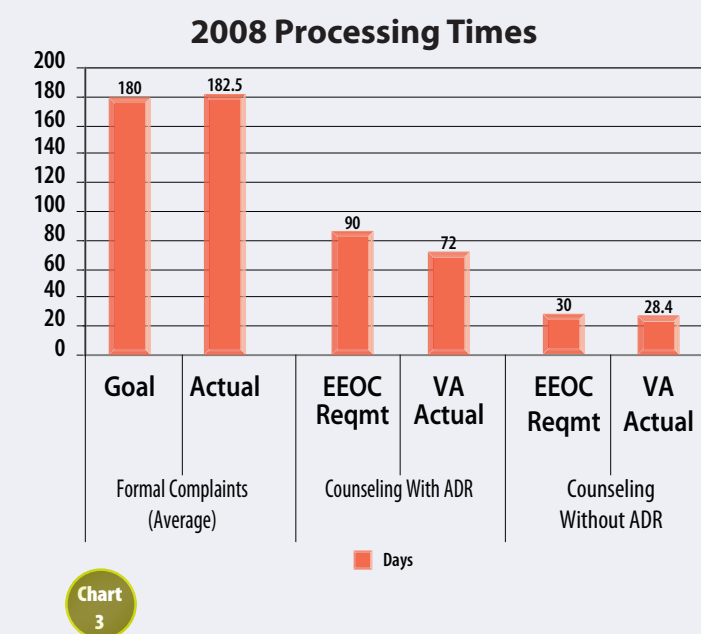


## III. FIELD OPERATIONS

As in FY 2007, an average of 7.6 out of every thousand employees filed complaints. However ORM's operations staff faced a formidable challenge when VA's workforce increased by more than 24,000 employees. This led to a 13% increase in the number of complaints filed, even though per capita filing rates did not change. Our field staff stepped up to this challenge, improving our processing times by 14% and completing investigations in an average of 182.5 days, just 1% over our strategic goal of 180 days. This was accomplished despite difficulties in hiring new investigators.

In addition, our field staff was able to maintain their excellent record of achievement in several other performance indices: completing counseling efforts in an average of 28.4 days, below the EEOC's mandate of 30 days; and completing counseling episodes in which ADR was elected in an average of 72 days, well below the EEOC requirement of 90 days.

These successes were only possible through the contributions of ORM's dedicated staff. As our investigators increased their workloads, other ORM staff volunteered to conduct investigations, and outside contractors were hired. Starting this fiscal year, ORM expects to meet its goal of processing complaints in an average of 180 days or less.



## IV. WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Ensuring that ORM has a positive work environment is one of the guiding objectives in ORM's Strategic Plan. This objective is an important element in the organizational realignment currently underway which will focus more managerial attention on issues surrounding our work environment.

**Customer Satisfaction.** ORM regularly monitors our EEO customers to assess our performance. Our customers include: VA senior managers, management officials cited in complaints, VA's legal counsel, EEO managers, aggrieved parties and complainants, VA's Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. For the third consecutive year, survey results yielded combined customer satisfaction in the 80% and higher range (see Chart below).

**Employee Satisfaction.** ORM has begun to more closely track employee satisfaction. A formal employee satisfaction survey was conducted in 2008 which confirmed the results of a preliminary questionnaire in 2007. In both, 62% of respondents rated their work environment as satisfactory, revealing substantial room for improvement. We have developed an action plan to address specific areas of weakness identified in the survey.

**Workforce.** ORM used some innovative hiring techniques in 2008 to successfully overcome a number of workforce-related obstacles. Due to a shortage of skilled EEO professionals among our applicant pool for full time positions, contract labor and re-employed annuitants were utilized to handle unexpected spikes in our EEO complaint workload. We also re-established the EEO Career Intern Program, creating a career pathway for entry-level applicants to EEO Investigator/Counselor/Specialist positions.

### 2008 Customer Satisfaction Results

