Veterans Benefits Administration
Fiscal Year (FY) 2014-2020 Strategic Plan

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

JULY 22, 2014

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Letter from the Under Secretary for Benefits

July 2014

The commitment our Nation has to its Servicemembers, Veterans, their families and Survivors begins the moment that our Servicemembers first put on their military uniform. Our mission as Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) employees also begins at that moment – and our obligation to deliver timely and high quality benefits and services to those who have served, and to their spouses, children, and parents, does not end. We are privileged to be a part of a lifelong engagement with the men and women who have dedicated their lives to our Nation's defense.

In 2011, VBA set out to transform its operations through people, process, and technology initiatives. We are committed to improving the way we deliver benefits and services, and our success depends on achievement of our transformation goals and our ongoing and future efforts to achieve the strategic goals and objectives outlined in the VA Strategic Plan and this document. We are creating a new era of increased access, more efficient operations, redesigned business processes, new technologies, and enhanced partnerships with other agencies and organizations supporting our Veterans.

Thanks to the exceptional dedication of our employees and the commitment of our partners, VBA has made significant progress toward eliminating the disability claims backlog and achieving a 98-percent decision-accuracy level. All 56 of our Regional Offices transitioned into a new organizational model and adopted an electronic web-based claims processing system months ahead of schedule. We updated our national training program, enhanced our quality review efforts, developed standardized tools, and increased automation, all leading to significant gains in both timeliness and accuracy. Technology has allowed us to move from paper-based processing into the world of electronic operations. In collaboration with our Congressional and Veterans Service Organization partners, we have increased awareness of and access to our web-based portal for claim submissions and launched numerous initiatives to give Veterans access to their benefits and services.

VBA is at a turning point in its Transformation. As we move closer to achievement of our goal to eliminate the disability claims backlog and ensure all Veterans receive high quality decisions on their claims, we must continue to transform and adapt to an ever-changing environment. We have laid the groundwork for expanded access; enhanced electronic processing capabilities; and seamless, secure exchange of critical information between Veterans, our workforce, and other Federal agencies and stakeholders. As we look to the future, we must build on our progress and accomplishments. The VBA Strategic Plan for the next five years outlines VBA's goals and objectives to fulfill our mission to deliver the best possible service to Servicemembers, Veterans, their families, and Survivors.

I ask that we continue to move forward boldly and with enthusiasm, united in our efforts to make a difference in the lives of those we serve.

Proud to be your Under Secretary,

Allison A. Hickey
Under Secretary for Benefits

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1 Introduction

The purpose of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Strategic Plan is to outline how VBA will operate over the next five years to achieve its vision to more effectively serve Servicemembers, Veterans, their families, and Survivors. For the purposes of this document, the term "Veteran" is inclusively used to describe these four groups. The VBA Strategic Plan envisions what a high-performing 21st Century organization will look like and what it will accomplish in the FY 2014-2020 timeframe. Every stakeholder has a role to play in the successful implementation of this strategic plan. Business lines, with support from staff offices, will develop operational plans to execute their programs while ensuring alignment with this VBA Strategic Plan.

In 2012, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) established three Agency Priority Goals (APGs) – improve Veteran access to VA benefits and services, eliminate the disability claims backlog, and eliminate Veteran homelessness. The VBA Strategic Plan takes into account VA's current APGs while creating a vision and strategy to meet the future needs of our Veterans.

In support of VA's transformation efforts, VBA has invested in initiatives to transform and improve service to Veterans. VBA has been retraining, reorganizing, streamlining business processes, and implementing technology solutions to improve benefits delivery. Building on past successes, VBA will continue its transformation efforts in order to provide efficient and reliable benefits and services that meet and exceed Veterans' expectations. The VBA Strategic Plan outlines the unifying goals, strategies, and objectives to support the APGs and VA's timeless mission by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans:

"To care for him who shall have borne the battle,
and for his widow and his orphan."
Abraham Lincoln[1]

1.1 VBA Mission

To serve as a leading advocate for Servicemembers, Veterans, their families and Survivors, delivering with excellence Veteran-centered and personalized benefits and services that honor their service, assist in their readjustment, enhance their lives, and engender their full trust.

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[1] Lincoln, Abraham. *"Second Inaugural Address." Inauguration,* United States Capitol, Washington, D.C. 4 March 1865.

VBA's mission supports VA's singular mission to care for those who have "borne the battle" and their Survivors. VBA, in partnership with the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and National Cemetery Administration (NCA), VA staff offices, and its many partners, provides an array of benefits and services to Veterans. VBA engages with Servicemembers from the moment they take their oath through final memorialization of their service. This lifelong engagement may include accessing life insurance upon entry into service, education, employment, home loans, and disability benefits after leaving the service. VBA strives to be a more readily accessible organization that timely and fully meets the needs of our Veterans throughout their lives.

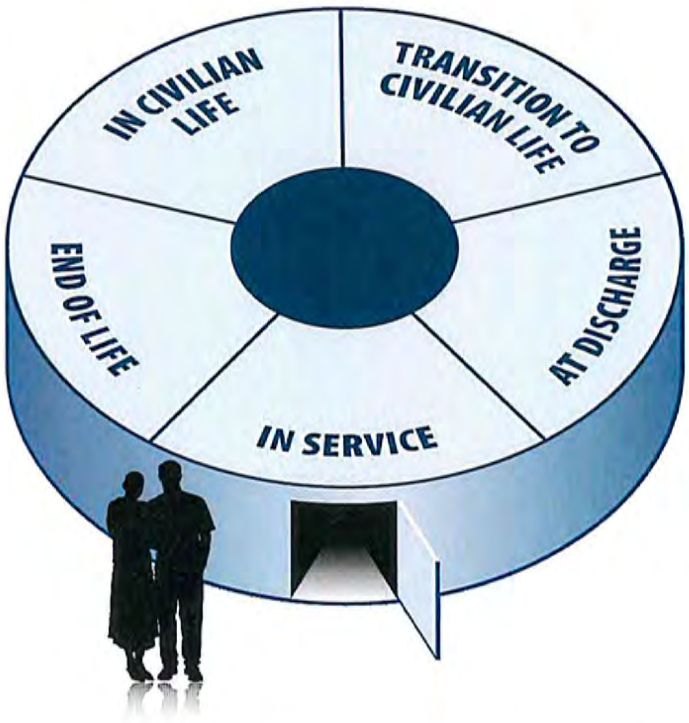

Figure 1: Lifelong Engagement for Those Who Serve

1.2 VBA Vision

To fulfill our Nation's promise to those who serve by delivering the benefits and services they have earned to enable full, independent, and productive lives.

VBA's vision for the future focuses on achieving a Veteran-centric service organization in which VBA engages Servicemembers from the time they enter service, throughout their life, to the final tribute when their service is memorialized. This lifelong engagement requires VBA to create an integrated network comprised of internal and external partners to proactively deliver benefits and services to Veterans. In this future state, Veterans will be able to quickly and easily access the full set of benefits to which they are entitled. This vision takes a forward-looking approach to the organization VBA will become.

1.3 FY 2014-2020 VBA Strategic Goals

Table 1 demonstrates the alignment of VBA's Strategic Plan goals to the VA Strategic Plan and the APGs. This alignment is being used to implement the Strategic Plan as mandated by the Government Performance and Results Act - Modernization Act (GPRA-MA).

VA Strategic Goals	VBA Strategic Goals	VA FY14-15 APGs
Goal 1: Empower Veterans to improve their well-being	**Goal 1**: Understand Veterans' needs for benefits and services and promote their understanding of VA benefits	Access, Backlog, Homelessness
	Goal 2: Provide the benefits and services that satisfy Veteran needs in the most efficient and effective way possible	Access, Backlog, Homelessness
Goal 2: Enhance and develop trusted partnerships	**Goal 3**: Collaborate with and engage the communities that serve Veterans	Access, Backlog, Homelessness
Goal 3: Manage and improve VA operations to deliver seamless and integrated support	**Goal 4**: Empower employees to serve Veterans reliably, efficiently, and with compassion	Access, Backlog

Table 1: Strategic Goal Alignment

VBA will achieve our vision for the future by following the strategic framework below:

VBA Goals	VBA Objectives
Understand Veterans' needs for benefits and services and promote their understanding of VA benefits	• Enhance VBA's familiarity with the Veteran population to better understand their needs • Increase the active participation rate (e.g. account activity) among engaged Veterans • Increase the percentage of Veterans who indicate VBA understands and meets their needs • Increase Veteran awareness of VA benefit programs
Provide the benefits and services that satisfy Veteran needs in the most efficient and effective way possible	• Diversify and expand the means for Veterans to access VBA services • Improve active-duty Servicemembers, National Guard, and Reserve Component access to benefits • Increase the use of secure electronic communications with Veterans • Improve the quality and timeliness of VA's response to Veteran inquiries • Process all VBA benefit claims and provide services to entitled individuals in a timely and accurate manner
Collaborate with and engage the communities that serve Veterans	• Increase VBA participation in community support networks • Increase Veteran participation in community support networks • Establish and lead coordinated, cross-agency approaches that provide benefits and services to our Veterans
Empower employees to serve Veterans reliably, efficiently, and with compassion	• Optimize processing capacity to meet the forecasted demand for services • Increase employee satisfaction • Inspire employees to internalize the VBA mission • Provide opportunities for career advancement

Table 2: VBA's Strategic Goals and Objectives

2 Understanding Veterans

VBA will work to better understand our Veterans and forecast demand for benefits and services. Changes in legislation, an aging Veteran population, an increase in the number of minorities and women[2] on active duty, and other factors have implications for how VBA will interact with an evolving Veteran population.[3] As the makeup of the Veteran population shifts, VBA will continue to evaluate and incorporate these changes into its planning process.

In an attempt to fully understand those we serve, VBA has identified several key emerging socio-economic and geopolitical trends. These "forces for change" will shape what kind of agency VBA will be in the future. These forces for change include the influence of a decade-long war, changing socio-demographic trends among Veterans, and the need for partnerships with the communities that also serve our Veterans.

2.1 Influence of a decade-long war

Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn have been fought by a professional, all-volunteer force of men and women. This force of superbly trained and disciplined men and women has experienced great physical and psychological strains and sacrifices as a result of long periods of war. The nature of wounds sustained by Servicemembers in Iraq and Afghanistan has become more complex as a result of bombings, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)[4], and the changing methods of warfare. Improvements in body armor and combat medicine have increased the survival rates for those injured in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, these Veterans still face a long and multi-faceted treatment and recovery process. More than 67% of the 1.4 million Veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have used a VA benefit or service. It is

"The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the Veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation."

–attributed to George Washington, 1789

[2] U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. *Strategic Environmental Assessment*, 2012. pg. 10.
[3] U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. *Report of the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans*. September 2013
[4] *US Library of National Medicine- National Institutes of Health. Treatment of War Wounds: A Historical Review. February 14, 2009. Accessed September 5, 2013. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2706344/*

estimated that there will be 600,000 more Veterans using VA benefits and services within the next 5 years.[5] The Veterans of this era, like all Veterans, will continue to draw on the benefits and services provided by VBA. VBA will continue to adapt to meet the evolving needs of Veterans.[6]

2.1.1 Changing Socio-Demographic Trends

VBA will evaluate the impact of changing demographics on the needs of Veterans. The U.S. has over 22 million Veterans, representing less than 10% of the American population, whose way of life they have served to protect. The total number of Veterans is declining, from 25.2 million in 2003 to 22.3 million in 2013. However, it is expected that the proportion of Veterans receiving a benefit from VBA will continue to increase. Increased racial and ethnic diversity[7], the shifting structure of the family, evolving gender roles, and other socio-demographic shifts have a significant impact on policy and VBA will respond accordingly. Changes in the Veteran population will increasingly impact Veteran needs and customer service expectations. Independent of age, Veterans are becoming more assertive and informed about their desire for access and self-service options.

2.1.2 Serving Women Veterans

The current population of women Veterans stands at 10.3%[8], and is expected to increase to 12.4%[9] by 2020 as women continue to serve in a broad variety of military assignments, including ground combat forces. Since the repeal of the 1994 policy prohibiting women from serving in combat[10], it is anticipated that 237,000[11] combat-related professions and unit type assignments will become available to women. As a result, women are expected to serve in combat units in greater numbers. VBA will resource appropriately to prepare for changes in

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[5] Joint Hearing of House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees. *Testimony of Richard J. Delaney National President of the Retired Enlisted Association, March 2014. Accessed May 2014 http://www.veterans.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/TREA%20Testimony%20Joint%20Hearing%20March%206%202014.pdf.*

[6] Secretary Eric K. Shinseki, *"Remarks for Secretary K. Shinseki" (speech, 2012 VFW Annual Convention, Reno, NV, July 24, 2012).*

[7] U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. *Strategic Environmental Scan, 2012 pg. 10*

[8] *National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population)*

[9] Office of the Actuary, Veteran Population Projections Model (VetPop 2011*). National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp)*

[10] *The Risk Rule. Defined in 1988, it prohibited women from serving in non-combat positions where the risks of exposure to "direct combat, hostile fire, or capture were equal or greater than the risk in the units they supported". In 1994, Defense Secretary Les Aspin rescinded the risk rule but explicitly stated that women "shall be excluded from assignment to units below brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground." http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/16/us/16womenbox.html*

[11] U.S. Department of Defense. *Dempsey: Allowing Women in Combat Strengthens Joint Force, Jan. 2013. Accessed May 2014 http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=119100*

demand for services by female combat Veterans. VBA is pursuing ways to understand the unique needs and medical issues for women when serving in active combat roles. VBA is positioning itself to respond in a way that understands of the needs of women Veterans.

2.1.3 Addressing Generational Influence

As VBA explores changes in the demographics of Veterans, there is a parallel between the evolving workforce in the public sector and the Veteran population. This influences how VBA provides benefits and services. Table 3 summarizes a recent study on the changing workforce in America. The parallel between these generational workforces and VBA's Veterans emerges from the major influences on each generation and the broad traits outlined in the table.

Generation	Major Trait	Major Influences	Broad Traits
Traditionalists	Loyalty	World War II, Cold War, Korean War, rise of suburbs	Sacrifice, loyalty, discipline, respect for authority
Baby Boomers	Competition	Watergate, women's rights, Woodstock, JFK assassination	Competitive, sandwiched generation, hard work, long hours
Generation X	Self-reliance	MTV, AIDS, Gulf War, 1987 stock market crash, fall of Berlin Wall	Eclecticism, self-reliance, free agents, work/life balance, independence
Millennials	Immediacy	*Social media, web-based search engines, 9/11 terrorist attacks, election of Barack Obama	Community service, cyber literacy, tolerance, diversity, confidence
Generation 2020	Hyper-connectedness	Social games, Iraq War, *Recession	Mobility, media savvy, life online starting in pre-school, reading books on e-readers

Table 3: Who are the Five Generations?[12]

[12] Jeanne C. Meister and Karie Willyerd. *The 2020 Workplace*, "Generations @ Work Global Survey." New York, Harper Collins. 2010, pg. 53 (*) Asterisks in the table indicate modifications to the original text.

Veterans' expectations regarding their interactions with VA are changing from traditional, face-to-face contact to digital and virtual communications. Veterans are more assertive about their customer service expectations and are increasingly willing to interact with VA through the internet. As such, Veterans anticipate having the ability to track claims electronically, interact with VA and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) virtually, track benefits in real-time through mobile applications, and have continual (24/7/365) access to products and information via web and mobile-based devices. VBA will analyze and anticipate how these differences will impact the way services are delivered. VBA is pursuing opportunities to change the way it connects and assists Veterans accordingly, while maintaining respect and compassion for their individual experiences and influences.

2.2 Need for Collaborative Relationships with our Communities

VBA is part of a broad community of service providers that serve Veterans. Community members range from federal departments and agencies, to state and local government agencies, to dedicated VSOs, to non-profit organizations, and corporate and commercial organizations. As society evolves over time, VBA will adapt its role in these communities to ensure it is positioned to satisfy its statutory obligations, as well as our Veterans' expectations.

VBA's future strategy extends the impact of its mission by recognizing the valuable role that community organizations play in supporting Veterans. VBA seeks to broaden its reach and increase the impact of benefits and services by establishing strategic goals, objectives and strategies to strengthen relationships with community organizations and assist Veterans with accessing their services. Figure 2 depicts this relationship.

Figure 2: Benefits and Services are provided through Multiple Organizations

3 Veterans Benefits Administration

VBA is transforming into a high-performing 21st Century organization that engages our Veterans throughout their lives with improved delivery of benefits and services. VBA in its current configuration was established in 1989 when the Veterans Administration was elevated to cabinet-level status as the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The benefits and services offered to Veterans today include the following: (for additional information, see the Annual Benefits Report)[13]

- **Disability Compensation and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)** – The Disability Compensation program provides monthly payments to Veterans to compensate them for the effects of disabilities, diseases, or injuries incurred or aggravated during active military service, and provides access to other VA benefits, such as health care. The DIC program provides monthly payments, as specified by law, to surviving spouses, dependent children and dependent parents in recognition of the economic loss caused by the Veteran's death during active military service or, subsequent to discharge from military service, as a result of a service-connected disability.
- **Pension and Fiduciary** – The Pension program "provides needs-based benefits designed to provide certain wartime Veterans and their Survivors a minimum level of income that raises their standard of living."[14] The Fiduciary program protects VA benefits paid to Veterans and other beneficiaries who are unable to manage their financial affairs.[15] The Pension program also provides monthly payments, as specified by law, to low income surviving spouses and dependent children of deceased wartime Veterans.[16]
- **Life Insurance** – VA is the Nation's ninth largest insurance enterprise and the Life Insurance program provides insurance benefits to Servicemembers at the time of their entry into service and offers Veterans insurance upon their separation from service.[17]
- **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E)** – VR&E helps Veterans who have service-connected disabilities prepare for and find meaningful, sustainable careers. Some

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[13] *www.vba.va.gov/reports/abr*
[14] *Annual Benefits Report: FY 2012, pg. 30*
[15] *US Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed September 2013, benefits.va.gov/fiduciary/index.asp*
[16] *Mission Statements, last modified November 8, 2009. Accessed July 26, 2012*
[17] *Life Insurance, last modified July 11, 2012, accessed July 26, 2012, http://www.insurance.va.gov/miscellaneous/index.htm.*

Veterans with service-connected disabilities may not be able to return to work, but with support from VR&E they can live fulfilling, independent lives.[18]

- **Education** – Education programs provide Veterans, Servicemembers, reservists, and certain family members of Veterans with educational opportunities post-separation.[19]
- **Home Loan Guaranty** – The Home Loan Guaranty program helps eligible Veterans, active duty personnel, surviving spouses, and members of the Reserves and National Guard "purchase, retain, and adapt homes in recognition of their service to the Nation."[20]

Today, these benefits are managed as six distinct lines of business within VBA. Each benefit has evolved over time and has its own unique history, enabling legislation, and eligibility criteria. VBA is committed to transforming the delivery of benefits so that Veterans receive high-quality and timely service. The goals and objectives that follow provide a framework to allow each business line to develop a properly resourced operational plan that will transition VBA to its future state.

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[18] *Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service, last modified February 9, 2012, accessed July 26, 2012, http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/.*
[19] *Annual Benefits Report: FY 2012, pg. 43.*
[20] *Annual Benefits Report: FY 2012, pg. 64.*

4 FY 2014-2020 VBA Strategic Plan

The strategic plan outlines how VBA will achieve its strategic vision and fulfill its obligation to Veterans. To become a Veteran-centered service organization, VBA will pursue the following strategic goals.

VBA Goal 1: Understand Veterans' needs for benefits and services and promote their understanding of VA benefits

VBA must understand who Veterans are, what they need, and how they prefer to receive services. The cornerstone of VBA's strategy for achieving these goals is to ***engage Servicemembers early in their careers*** – ideally, when they first enlist or are commissioned. Doing so ensures that Servicemembers are fully aware of the benefits they accrue as part of their service, and are comfortable with the process for accessing their records. Directly related to this strategy is the creation of a unified electronic account structure that supports this ***lifelong relationship*** among VA, Servicemembers, and Veterans. This account would comprehensively capture all benefits, services, and health-related activities for Veterans. Through their account, Veterans will be able to directly provide information relating to their own needs and preferences for obtaining services. Finally, VBA will make serving and assisting Veterans the focus of its operations by implementing hands-on engagement between Veterans and employees.

VBA Strategic Plan Objective	Strategies
1.1. Enhance VBA's familiarity with the Veterans population to better understand their needs	**1.1.1** Establish a capability to accurately project the benefits and services Veterans are likely to request.
1.2 Increase utilization of VBA programs and services	**1.2.1** Expand unified electronic account structure and management system to provide access to Veterans throughout their lives.
1.3 Increase the percentage of Veterans who indicate VBA understands and meets their needs	**1.3.1** Ensure VBA provides effective, direct delivery of services and assistance to Veterans.
1.4 Increase VBA Veterans awareness of VA benefit programs and services	**1.4.1** Present comprehensive information about VA programs to Veterans and encourage them to actively manage their VA benefits.

Table 4: VBA Goal 1 Objectives and Strategies

VBA Goal 2: Provide the benefits and services that satisfy Veterans' needs in the most efficient and effective way possible

VBA is experiencing a growing demand for services and more complex customer expectations. As a result, VA is working to become an agile organization that meets Veterans' expectations regarding how services and assistance should be delivered. VBA will continue to ***develop the web-based and mobile technology solutions*** that Veterans increasingly expect and diversify the ***means available for accessing and managing their accounts*** (i.e., viewing or updating their records, submitting information relating to claims for benefits, etc.). In addition to members serving on active duty, VBA will continue to ***tailor services for National Guard / Reserve Component (NG/RC) Veterans.***[21] VBA will engage NG/RC Veterans and promote awareness of their benefits, despite intermittent periods of activation and the related challenges of accessing and managing their records.

VBA Strategic Plan Objective	Strategies
2.1 Diversify and expand the means for Veterans to access VBA programs and services	**2.1.1** Provide a variety of electronic self-service options to extend VBA's reach and improve Veteran access.
2.2 Improve active duty Servicemember, National Guard, and Reserve Component access to benefits	**2.2.1** Establish enrollment in eBenefits at the time active duty commences. Increase enrollment for National Guard, Reserve Component, and Servicemembers who have left the service by leveraging pre-existing relationships and infrastructure. **2.2.2** VBA will ensure that National Guard and Reserve Component compensation benefits are stopped upon activation or federal mobilization and then resumed upon demobilization.
2.3 Increase the use of secure electronic communications with Veterans	**2.3.1** Develop and implement secure electronic options that provide effective, efficient interactions with Veterans.
2.4 Improve the quality and timeliness of VA's response to Veteran inquiries	**2.4.1** Create an enterprise-wide capability to conduct electronic transactions with Veterans.
2.5 Process all VBA benefit claims and provide services to entitled individuals in a timely and accurate manner	**2.5.1** Identify factors driving the workload within VBA, with emphasis on regulatory and legislative impacts on VA benefits and services.

Table 5: VBA Goal 2 Objectives and Strategies

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[21] *For the purposes of this document, National Guard and Reserve Components refer to the following groups: Army National Guard, Air National Guard, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Army Reserve, and US Coast Guard Reserve. NG refers to two of the seven groups, while RC covers the other five as described by the NDAA.*

VBA Goal 3: Collaborate with and engage the communities that serve Veterans

VBA will encourage collaboration among federal, state and local community organizations (i.e. "community networks") to provide Veterans with needed assistance. Acting as a catalyst for bringing together information and resources, VBA will enable Veterans to get the most relevant benefit or service available. VBA's strategy for accomplishing this goal is to ***ensure community networks, including collaborative partnerships with the Department of Defense (DOD) and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), have access to the information and technical infrastructure*** they need to help Veterans. In addition, VBA will ***encourage Veterans to utilize community organizations*** that are best able to deliver assistance. Collaboration will lead to a sustainable, world-class support system for Veterans with an extended reach and more accessible services.

VBA Strategic Plan Objective	Strategies
3.1 Increase VBA participation in community support networks	**3.1.1** Engage with community organizations and foster new relationships with local assistance providers.
3.2 Increase Veteran awareness of and participation in community support networks	**3.2.1** Encourage state, county, and federal level organizations to enhance Veterans' awareness of the services and benefits that are available.
3.3 Establish and lead coordinated interagency and cross-agency approaches that provide benefits and services to Veterans	**3.3.1** Establish capabilities that provide shared information to create interagency and cross-agency integration.

Table 6: VBA Goal 3 Objectives and Strategies

VBA Goal 4: Empower employees to serve Veterans reliably, efficiently, and with compassion

VBA's greatest asset is its workforce. To ensure a high-quality experience for Veterans, VBA will provide its employees with the tools, skills, and support they need and the recognition they deserve. A high-quality customer experience is defined along the following three dimensions:

- **Reliability**: VBA must be consistent in the way it determines eligibility for benefits, and how it serves Veterans. Even more importantly, VBA employees must sustain Veteran trust by being a quality-focused and reliable provider of benefits and services. This includes consistency across geographic areas and regional offices.
- **Efficiency**: VBA must provide clear and accurate answers, process applications for benefits, and conduct business transactions in a timely and productive manner. VBA must also provide answers and services that Veterans find most relevant and useful to their needs.

- **Compassion**: VBA must balance its desire to be an efficient and reliable organization with the ability to be responsive and sensitive to the individual circumstances of each Veteran. VBA must respect the time and dignity of those it serves.

Delivering an enhanced customer experience is ultimately dependent on VBA's employees (both its staff and its leadership). VBA will create an organizational environment that empowers employees to excel and value Veterans. VBA will ***adopt proven commercial solutions*** based on industry experience to enhance the quality of its service and ***develop collaborative partnerships*** to operate more effectively.

VBA Strategic Plan Objective	Strategies
4.1 Optimize processing capacity to meet the forecasted demand for services	**4.1.1** Evaluate best practices in people, processes, and technologies that will enhance the capabilities provided to our employees and determine the applicability within VBA.
4.2 Increase employee satisfaction	**4.2.1** Work with our labor union partners to create a work environment that attracts the best employees, encourages employees to achieve a well-balanced professional career, and improves retention.
4.3 Inspire employees to internalize the VBA mission	**4.3.1** Enhance employee engagement with Veterans. Recognize employees who exemplify commitment to Veterans in their daily work.
4.4 Provide opportunities for career advancement and job fulfillment	**4.4.1** Continue to develop and implement a workforce plan[22] that cultivates leaders dedicated to excellence and professional growth opportunities.

Table 7: VBA Goal 4 Objectives and Strategies

[22] *Office of the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs Strategic Human Capital Plan, 2013-2017, Jan 2013.*

5 Implementation and Integration

The VBA Strategic Plan identifies overall goals and objectives for VBA and is a key input to the VA Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution (PPBE) process, which supports VBA in meeting its strategic objectives on a recurring basis. In order to achieve these goals and objectives, it is important that each Line of Business (LoB) develop an operational plan that uses VA's and VBA's overall goals and objectives to develop its own strategic goals and vision for the future. The operational planning process translates strategic goals into inputs for resource allocation and will help LoBs to:

- Develop the business line's goals and vision for achieving VBA's strategic goals
- Identify the capabilities necessary to achieve these goals
- Identify the resources for the planning milestones, performance outcomes, and capabilities that justify and provide input to the annual VBA, Office of Information & Technology, and facilities budget submission.

This FY 2014-2020 VBA Strategic Plan (one of the main outputs of the Quadrennial Strategic Planning Process (QSPP))[23] provides a framework for planning, resourcing, and measuring VBA's progress towards its vision. LoB operational plans consist of activities and milestones that are aligned with VBA's strategic plan strategies, objectives and goals prioritizing resources and applying milestones and timelines to those activities. To create these operational plans, VBA's LoBs must define their mission requirements and long-term objectives through the five year planning period and collaborate with supporting organizations. VBA supporting staff offices will work closely with representatives from information and technology, facilities, human resources, communications, financial management, planning and programming, and business architecture to integrate their capabilities. The coordinated effort between LoBs and supporting staff offices will yield continuous improvement in providing Veterans with the delivery of benefits and services.

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[23] *The QSPP refers to the development and execution of the VBA Strategic Plan and framework based on the environmental scans and analysis of alternative futures conducted every four years (as part of the planning cycle).*

5.1 VBA's Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) Process

As shown in Figure 3, and further illustrated in Appendix C, the VBA PPBE process culminates in the annual creation of milestones and resources that meet VA's Planning and Programming Guidance for the appropriate five-year cycle. The milestones, resource allocations, and justification of the business line plans become the inputs to the budget process. Through this coordinated vision and the feedback from execution to planning, VBA ensures that budget requests meet business needs; are clearly justified and prioritized; and are appropriately resourced. The focus as delineated in the VA Planning and Programming Guidance is on developing requirements and building a thoughtful, long-term plan.

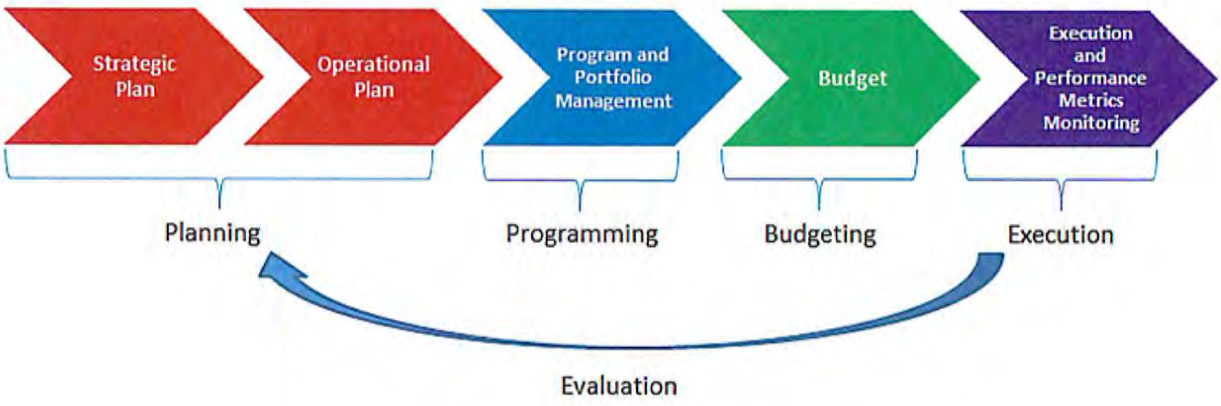

Figure 3: PPBE Process

Appendices

Appendix A – List of Acronyms

APG	Agency Priority Goal
BAS	Benefits Assistance Service
CRP	Capabilities Requirements Proposal
CS	Compensation Service
DIC	Dependency and Indemnity Compensation
EDU	Education
FY	Fiscal Year
GPRA-MA	Government Performance and Results Act - Modernization Act
LGY	Loan Guaranty
LoB	Line of Business
NCA	National Cemetery Administration
NG	National Guard
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
P&F	Pension and Fiduciary
PPBE	Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution
QSPP	Quadrennial Strategic Planning Process
RC	Reserve Component
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs
VBA	Veterans Benefits Administration
VBMS	Veterans Benefits Management System
VHA	Veterans Health Administration
VR&E	Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment
VRM	Veterans Relationship Management
VSO	Veterans Service Organization

Appendix B – Quadrennial Strategic Planning Framework

The VBA Strategic Plan identifies Veteran-centric outcomes and performance results for VBA in 2014-2020 and the strategies that will be used to achieve them. It does so under the guidance of the Department of Veterans Affairs FY 2014-2020 Strategic Plan and the specific statutory requirements defined in the Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act (GPRA-MA), as well as directives issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to enhance administrative efficiency and accountability.

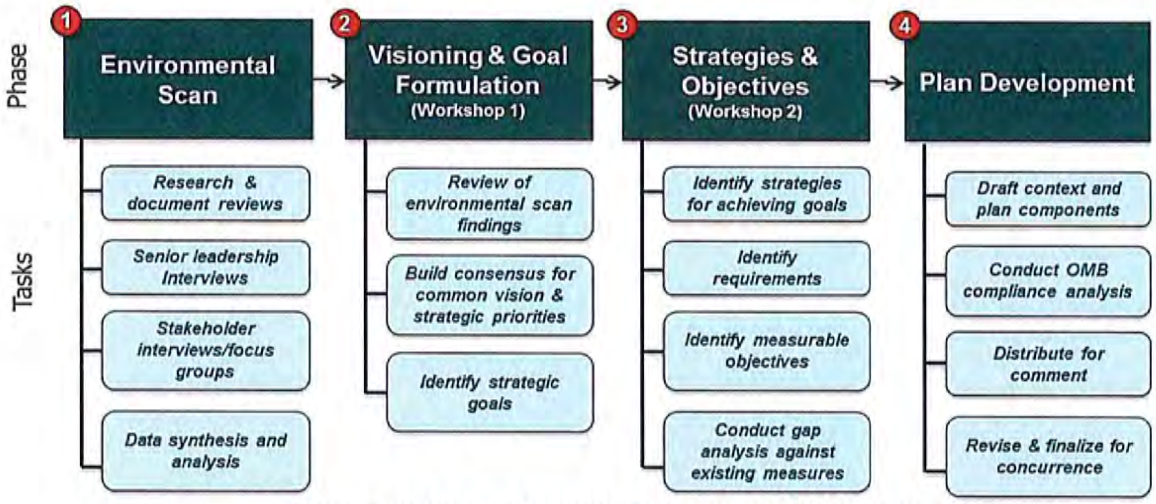

Figure 4: VBA Quadrennial Strategic Planning Process

The strategic planning process gathers input and builds consensus among VBA's leadership, partners and stakeholders for a common vision, goals, objectives and strategies that will be necessary to achieve a high-performing 21st Century organization by 2020. VBA executes its quadrennial planning through:

- Extensive research and analysis using VBA data, with additional analysis conducted by other groups within VA and external to the Department, as well as those conducted by public and private organizations to identify emerging socio-economic and geopolitical trends that may impact VBA's mission
- Interviews and focus groups with internal and external stakeholders (including VSOs, non-profit organizations, and Veterans) to obtain feedback on VBA's success and areas in which the agency can improve in the future
- Site visits with community leaders in multiple geographic regions of the country to obtain information and identify how VBA might collaborate with community-based organizations
- Workshops with VBA's executive leadership, its labor union partners, and representatives from the VSOs to formulate effective strategies to define outcomes.

Appendix C – PPBE Process

VBA has instituted an integrated Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution (PPBE) process as part of VA's efforts. PPBE provides an integrated, structured, and data-driven approach to support VA's requirement to assess its needs, allocate resources, and produce a budget that delivers high quality and timely benefits and services to Veterans. Figure 5 represents the Quadrennial Strategic Planning Process (QSPP), the annual five-year programming cycle, and the annual budget development process.

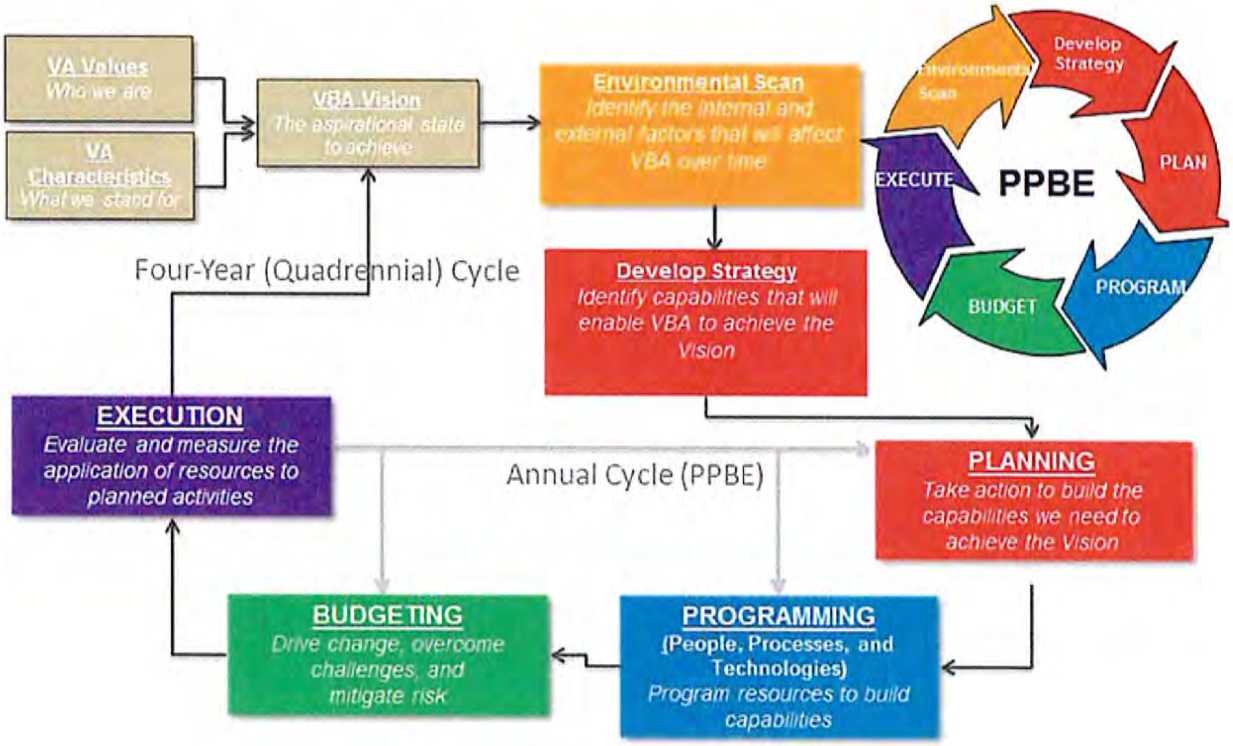

Figure 5: VBA Quadrennial and Annual Processes

The steps of the PPBE process are outlined below:

Planning establishes the strategic priorities and capabilities required to achieve VA's mission and strategy. This phase includes definition and examination of alternative strategies; analysis of changing conditions and trends; and the application of technology and economic assessments to understand the long-term implications of both change and current choices. The planning phase defines and evaluates alternate strategies to address VA's emerging needs and lays the foundation for determining the capabilities required to achieve VA's strategic goals.

Programming identifies and allocates VA's resources to the programs that provide the capabilities required to achieve VA strategic priorities. This phase includes identification of the capabilities and associated programs necessary to carry out VA's strategies; validation and prioritization of program requirements; definition and analysis of alternative organization structures, resource and staffing requirements, and support systems (including IT and facilities); and multi-year resource implications and evaluation of trade-off options. The programming phase allocates, balances, and integrates resources among various programs according to VA priorities.

Budgeting prepares VA's input to the President's Budget for submission to Congress. The operating plans provide justification for the approved programs authorized in the VA Programming Decision Memorandum. This phase is focused on the formulation of VA's budget which will be authorized and appropriated by Congress. The execution of programs in VA's budget will support achieving VA strategic goals and objectives.

Execution involves developing and delivering the required capabilities to achieve the goals and objectives articulated in the strategic plan, as well as measuring how well the desired capabilities were achieved. This phase includes execution of the enacted budget to ensure funds are spent in accordance with the law; program management and reviews to ensure execution consistency in accordance with VA's program management framework and approved program management plans; and evaluation and measurement of program outcomes to ensure they meet assigned metrics and assist VA in achieving its strategic goals.[24]

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[24] US Department of Veterans Affairs, *FY2016-2020 Planning Guidance, September 27*, 2013.