



## DETAILED INFORMATION ON THE VETERANS BURIAL BENEFITS ASSESSMENT

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<b>Program Code</b>	10000462										
<b>Program Title</b>	Veterans Burial Benefits										
<b>Department Name</b>	Department of Veterans Affairs										
<b>Agency/Bureau Name</b>	Department of Veterans Affairs										
<b>Program Type(s)</b>	Direct Federal Program										
<b>Assessment Year</b>	2002										
<b>Assessment Rating</b>	<b>Moderately Effective</b>										
<b>Assessment Section Scores</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Section</th> <th>Score</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Program Purpose &amp; Design</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strategic Planning</td> <td>86%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Program Management</td> <td>72%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Program Results/Accountability</td> <td>73%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Section	Score	Program Purpose & Design	100%	Strategic Planning	86%	Program Management	72%	Program Results/Accountability	73%
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<b>Program Funding Level (in millions)</b>	<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td><b>FY2006</b></td> <td>\$155</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>FY2007</b></td> <td>\$159</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>FY2008</b></td> <td>\$167</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<b>FY2006</b>	\$155	<b>FY2007</b>	\$159	<b>FY2008</b>	\$167				
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<b>FY2008</b>	\$167										

- [Program Improvement Plans](#)
- [Program Performance Measures](#)
- [Questions/Answers \(Detailed Assessment\)](#)

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### Program Improvement Plans

Year Began	Improvement Plan	Status	Comments
2004	Proposes a 4.8 percent increase in discretionary funding.	Completed	Included in President's FY 2005 Budget.
2003	Will adopt more performance measures to address all burial benefits and the national shrine commitment	Completed	Data for the three new national shrine commitment measures are helping to drive performance improvements. For example, the percentage of headstones and markers in national cemeteries at the proper height and alignment increased from 64% in FY 2004 (baseline) to 70% in FY 2005. NCA has developed measures for headstone and marker applications received electronically and interments scheduled via the internet for the FY 2008 and FY 2009 budget submissions, respectively.
2005	Collect and analyze data from two new performance measures	Completed	These measures were included as part of VA's 2005 budget submission. VBA continues to collect and report these data as part of VA's annual budget submission. Measuring burial claims data

	to assess processing of burial claims.		has helped to improve the National Accuracy Rate for burial claims processed from 62% in 2000 to 94% in 2006.
2006	Use data results from three new performance measures to drive improvements in program operations (National Shrine Commitment).	Action taken, but not completed	During 2004, collected baseline data for the three new National Shrine Commitment measures. As a result, the gap between current performance and strategic goals has been identified. Data for these are now regularly collected and reported and are helping to drive performance improvements. Improvements at national cemeteries to maintain shrine status is an ongoing action item.
2003	Continuing to strengthen methods to link performance, budget, and accountability.	Action taken, but not completed	Performance measures are evaluated annually and adjusted as necessary to improve the linkage between budgetary resources and desired results. VA is developing a methodology for estimating the marginal costs of changing performance targets. This will be applied to a subset of measures in future budgets.

### Program Performance Measures

Term	Type																																		
Long-term	Outcome	<p><b>Measure:</b> Percent of veterans served by a burial option within a reasonable distance (75 miles) of their residence</p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> This measure tracks the percent of veterans served by a burial option in a national or state veterans cemetery available within 75 miles of the veteran's place of residence.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Target</th> <th>Actual</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>1999</td><td>76.3</td><td>67</td></tr> <tr><td>2000</td><td>75.1</td><td>72.6</td></tr> <tr><td>2001</td><td>75.8</td><td>72.6</td></tr> <tr><td>2002</td><td>73.9</td><td>73.9</td></tr> <tr><td>2003</td><td>74.4</td><td>75.2</td></tr> <tr><td>2004</td><td>75.3</td><td>75.3</td></tr> <tr><td>2005</td><td>78.3</td><td>77.1</td></tr> <tr><td>2006</td><td>81.6</td><td>80.2</td></tr> <tr><td>2007</td><td>83.8</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>2008</td><td>84.6</td><td></td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Target	Actual	1999	76.3	67	2000	75.1	72.6	2001	75.8	72.6	2002	73.9	73.9	2003	74.4	75.2	2004	75.3	75.3	2005	78.3	77.1	2006	81.6	80.2	2007	83.8		2008	84.6	
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Long-term	Outcome	<p><b>Measure:</b> Percent of respondents who rate the quality of service provided by the national cemeteries as excellent</p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA Headquarters staff oversees the data collection process for the annual Survey of Satisfaction with National Cemeteries. The survey collects data from family members and funeral directors who have recently received services from a national cemetery.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Target</th> <th>Actual</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>1999</td><td>88</td><td>84</td></tr> <tr><td>2000</td><td>88</td><td>88</td></tr> <tr><td>2001</td><td>90</td><td>92</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Target	Actual	1999	88	84	2000	88	88	2001	90	92																					
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2002	93	91
2003	95	94
2004	95	94
2005	95	94
2006	96	94
2007	97	
2008	97	

Long-term Outcome **Measure:** Percent of respondents who rate national cemetery appearance as excellent

*Explanation:* VA Headquarters staff oversees THE data collection process for THE annual Survey of Satisfaction with National Cemeteries. The survey collects data from family members and funeral directors who have recently received services from a national cemetery

Year	Target	Actual
1999	80	79
2000	82	82
2001	88	96
2002	96	97
2003	98	97
2004	98	98
2005	98	98
2006	99	97
2007	99	
2008	99	

### Questions/Answers (Detailed Assessment)

Section 1 - Program Purpose & Design			
Number	Question	Answer	Score
1.1	<p><b>Is the program purpose clear?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> The purpose of the program is to provide veterans with burial benefits in recognition for their service to our Nation.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> The mission of the National Cemetery Administration is to honor veterans with a final resting place and lasting memorials that commemorate their service to our Nation, as stated in VA's Mission Statement, VA Strategic Plan, and Title 38.</p>	YES	20%
1.2	<p><b>Does the program address a specific interest, problem or need?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA is addressing a special interest, which is to honor veterans with a final resting place and provide assistance to defray a veteran's burial expenses. The benefit is still in demand by an aging veteran population. The national and state cemetery systems are still in a state of expansion.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> Veteran death rates peak in 2006-2008, as evidenced in VA's</p>	YES	20%

	Mission statement, Veteran Population 2000 Report, and Burial Benefits 2000 Study.		
1.3	<p><b>Is the program designed to have a significant impact in addressing the interest, problem or need?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA builds and maintains a national cemetery system and awards grants for the establishment or expansion of state cemeteries. The private sector has an extensive system of cemeteries and VA offers a monetary benefits for veterans who chose to be buried in a private cemetery. The delivery of veteran benefits will always change to address the needs of veterans. A federal role will always be critical in honoring veterans.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> The majority of the discretionary funding (83%) goes towards operating the national cemetery system, which is a permanent expense due to "perpetual care" aspect of cemetery operations. If funding was decreased, cemeteries could not open or expand, current cemetery maintenance would deteriorate, and state cemeteries would not open. Thus, veterans would experience a decrease in benefits and service, as evidenced in Veteran Population 2000 Report and President's 2003 Budget.</p>	YES	20%
1.4	<p><b>Is the program designed to make a unique contribution in addressing the interest, problem or need (i.e., not needlessly redundant of any other Federal, state, local or private efforts)?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA provides eligible veterans with burial benefits that complement (not compete with) other entities, such as states and private cemeteries. VA works closely with the states through the State Cemetery Grants Program to establish, expand and improve state veterans cemeteries that complement VA's system of national cemeteries. VA provides veterans who chose a private cemetery with monetary benefits as well as a headstone or marker. This array of benefits gives the veterans and their families flexibility and choice.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> Title 38, USC, established both national cemeteries and the State Cemetery Grants Program (SCGP). VA's goal to provide 85% (by 2008) of veterans with a burial option within 75 miles of their residence includes both national and state veterans cemeteries. Unlike private cemeteries, each national cemetery is a national shrine that honors the service and sacrifice of veterans.</p>	YES	20%
1.5	<p><b>Is the program optimally designed to address the interest, problem or need?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA's planning strategy is to place national cemeteries in locations with high veteran population densities, and to provide funding for state veterans cemeteries where there are no plans to build a national cemetery. A veteran population threshold of 170,000 has been established for planning new national cemeteries. State veterans cemeteries will address needs below this threshold. This approach provides an appropriate mix of federal and state facilities.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> Funding for the State Cemetery Grants Program has increased from \$1 million in FY 1997 to \$32 million in FY 2003, as evidenced in the Millennium Act Reports and the President's 2003 Budget.</p>	YES	20%

Section 1 - Program Purpose & Design		Score	100%
<b>Section 2 - Strategic Planning</b>			
Number	Question	Answer	Score
2.1	<p><b>Does the program have a limited number of specific, ambitious long-term performance goals that focus on outcomes and meaningfully reflect the purpose of the program?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA does have a limited number of long-term goals that are broad enough to cover all aspects of the program.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> An example of a long-term goal is: Increase the percent of veterans served by a burial option in a national or state veterans cemetery within a reasonable distance (75 miles) of their residence to 84%, as stated in VA's Performance Plan.</p>	YES	14%
2.2	<p><b>Does the program have a limited number of annual performance goals that demonstrate progress toward achieving the long-term goals?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA does have a limited number of annual performance goals that demonstrate progress, which focus on national and state cemeteries' service. However, VA needs to develop annual performance goals for monetary burial benefits, burial options, and the National Shrine Commitment. The National Shrine Commitment, while commanding significant budgetary resources, fails to have any associated annual goals.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> An example of a annual performance goal is: Increase to 80 the number of kiosks installed at national and state veterans cemeteries to electronically inform visitors where specific grave sites are located, as stated in VA's Performance Plan.</p>	YES	14%
2.3	<p><b>Do all partners (grantees, sub-grantees, contractors, etc.) support program planning efforts by committing to the annual and/or long-term goals of the program?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA collects performance data from visitors, funeral directors, veterans, and their families through an annual survey. VA has performance-based contracts. State veterans cemeteries support program effort to provide burial options for eligible veterans and their families. VA does have room for improvement in the area of grantees.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> VA conducts a regularly scheduled survey, which collects performance data from visitors, funeral directors, veterans, and their families. VA uses this data to improve its performance, as evidenced in VA's Performance Plan and customer surveys.</p>	YES	14%
2.4	<p><b>Does the program collaborate and coordinate effectively with related programs that share similar goals and objectives?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA collects performance and burial data from state veterans cemeteries that have the same standards of eligibility. Other federal and state veterans cemeteries order 89% of their headstones and markers on-line through VA's systems. VA works with DoD to provide military funeral</p>	YES	14%

	<p>honors. In addition, VA coordinates and shares best practices with Arlington National Cemetery.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> VA awards grants to states to construct or expand state veterans cemeteries. In addition, VA counts state cemetery burials towards VA's performance measures, as evidenced in VA's Performance Plan.</p>		
2.5	<p><b>Are independent and quality evaluations of sufficient scope conducted on a regular basis or as needed to fill gaps in performance information to support program improvements and evaluate effectiveness?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> The Millennium Act required several independent studies, including future burial needs, burial programs, cemetery improvements, and standards of appearance. These studies have been completed and provide a foundation for subsequent evaluations of VA's burial programs. Burial programs are regularly evaluated by site visits, quality reviews, and customer satisfaction survey data. VA has not initiated an overall program evaluation but intends to conduct one in the next couple years.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> VA uses the findings of its reports and surveys to improve its performance. For example, VA is currently developing Standards of Appearance for all national cemeteries based on an independent contractor report on private cemetery standards (evidenced in the Millennium Act reports, quality reports, customer survey data, and VA's Performance Plan).</p>	YES	14%
2.6	<p><b>Is the program budget aligned with the program goals in such a way that the impact of funding, policy, and legislative changes on performance is readily known?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA has developed a cost accounting system that will identify costs associated with its primary mission activities. The cost accounting system is being tested and refined to ensure the accuracy of the data that feeds into the model. Also, the 2004 budget account restructuring, which aligns all burial programs under one appropriation, will better reflect the impact of funding changes on results. Once these efforts are complete VA will be better prepared to link the budget and program goals. The current system does not allow for effective program-based budgeting.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> It is not known how much money is needed to increase customer satisfaction by 1%, for example. Furthermore, VA can not accurately predict the impact of policy and legislative changes without a cost-accounting system or program performance-based budgeting.</p>	NO	0%
2.7	<p><b>Has the program taken meaningful steps to address its strategic planning deficiencies?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA is developing annual goals for the National Shrine Commitment and the monetary burial benefits. Recently, VA has defined the National Shrine Commitment and the population threshold for building new national cemeteries.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> VA has taken the first step in this process by developing Standards for Appearance for national cemeteries. VA is expected to provide annual goals to measure the National Shrine Commitment within the next</p>	YES	14%

year. In addition, performance measures for the monetary burial benefits are expected to be included in the FY2005 budget.

**Section 2 - Strategic Planning**      Score    86%

### Section 3 - Program Management

Number	Question	Answer	Score
3.1	<p><b>Does the agency regularly collect timely and credible performance information, including information from key program partners, and use it to manage the program and improve performance?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA collects data annually from national cemetery system customers (veterans, families, and funeral directors). VA does have room for improvement in collecting data from grantees and monetary benefit recipients.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> VA has constant stakeholder contact and uses it to improve operations. For example, VA surveys visitors of the national cemetery system and uses the data to improve service and/or appearance.</p>	YES	14%
3.2	<p><b>Are Federal managers and program partners (grantees, subgrantees, contractors, etc.) held accountable for cost, schedule and performance results?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA collects performance data from the annual customer survey and has performance-based contracts; however, it is unclear how the information is used to increase managers' performance. VA is currently developing a cemetery management accountability system.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> VA has not developed an agency-wide accountability system. There is no evidence that program partners and managers are held accountable for past performance.</p>	NO	0%
3.3	<p><b>Are all funds (Federal and partners') obligated in a timely manner and spent for the intended purpose?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA obligates the vast majority of its burial benefits funds by the end of a given fiscal year.</p> <p><i>Evidence:</i> The majority of the funding is for employee salaries and mandatory benefits. The State Cemetery Grant Program obligates differently but as expected.</p>	YES	14%
3.4	<p><b>Does the program have incentives and procedures (e.g., competitive sourcing/cost comparisons, IT improvements) to measure and achieve efficiencies and cost effectiveness in program execution?</b></p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> VA has developed a cost accounting system that will identify costs associated with its primary mission activities. However, they are still in the testing and refining stage. When it is complete they will be able to capture unit costs and report on individual activities such as cemetery burials. This system will provide a valuable tool for managers in evaluating their operation and understanding its cost structure. It will be a significant improvement over the current, more limited system.</p>	NO	0%

	<i>Evidence:</i> VA is progressive in its use of performance-based contracting and continues to look at new ways to conduct its business. However, the process is not documented and is still in the early stages.		
3.5	<b>Does the agency estimate and budget for the full annual costs of operating the program (including all administrative costs and allocated overhead) so that program performance changes are identified with changes in funding levels?</b>	YES	14%
	<i>Explanation:</i> VA's budget includes funds for construction, administration, mandatory benefits, and grants. Under the account restructuring project currently underway, all these expenses will be displayed in one account.		
	<i>Evidence:</i> VA has several reports in the Congressional Justification that demonstrate its ability to estimate the programs full cost.		
3.6	<b>Does the program use strong financial management practices?</b>	YES	14%
	<i>Explanation:</i> VA was free of any material internal control weaknesses in this area.		
	<i>Evidence:</i> This is demonstrated in the Management Controls Process, VA Performance Plan, and IG Audit Report 1999 and 2000.		
3.7	<b>Has the program taken meaningful steps to address its management deficiencies?</b>	YES	14%
	<i>Explanation:</i> VA continues to improve its operations to increase efficiency and effectiveness. VA is creating a cost accounting system, and management accountability system, and new performance measures.		
	<i>Evidence:</i> VA surveys its customers, promotes employee inventions, implements performance-based contracting, and is analyzing the effectiveness of increasing outsourcing.		
<b>Section 3 - Program Management</b>		Score	72%

<b>Section 4 - Program Results/Accountability</b>			
<b>Number</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Score</b>
4.1	<b>Has the program demonstrated adequate progress in achieving its long-term outcome goal(s)?</b>	YES	20%
	<i>Explanation:</i> VA increases performance every year and meets annual goals.		
	<i>Evidence:</i> As stated in VA's Performance Plan.		
4.2	<b>Does the program (including program partners) achieve its annual performance goals?</b>	SMALL EXTENT	7%
	<i>Explanation:</i> VA does not have annual output goals associated with the burial option and appearance outcome goals; however, output goals are in development. The two output measures listed below pertain to the service outcome measure. It is also not clear if program partners commit and achieve annual goals.		

<i>Evidence:</i> As stated in VA's Performance Plan.			
4.3	<b>Does the program demonstrate improved efficiencies and cost effectiveness in achieving program goals each year?</b>	SMALL EXTENT	7%
<i>Explanation:</i> VA continues to improve operations; however, the plan and outcomes do not document improved efficiency over the prior year. For example, employees have created new cemetery equipment to help with improve cemetery maintenance and appearance.			
<i>Evidence:</i> VA does not have performance measures that relate to efficiencies, management improvements, or outsourcing, evidenced in VA's Performance Plan.			
4.4	<b>Does the performance of this program compare favorably to other programs with similar purpose and goals?</b>	YES	20%
<i>Explanation:</i> VA is the largest provider of federal burial benefits. Other federal agency programs do not compare in size or scope. No common performance measure exists but VA performance would at least be on par with the rest.			
<i>Evidence:</i> 90% of survey respondents rate the service provide by the National Cemetery System as excellent, evidenced in VA's Performance Plan.			
4.5	<b>Do independent and quality evaluations of this program indicate that the program is effective and achieving results?</b>	YES	20%
<i>Explanation:</i> Several specific studies have been conducted. Based on the reports generated by these studies, VA has established population thresholds for constructing a new national cemetery and are working on appearance standards for the national cemetery system.			
<i>Evidence:</i> A number of reports required by the Millennium Act indicate program effectiveness toward results.			
<b>Section 4 - Program Results/Accountability</b>		Score	73%

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