

Strategic Goal 4

Strategic Goal	Objective	Key Performance Measure
→	→	
<p>Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being and history of the Nation.</p>	<p>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 support to national, state, and local emergency management and homeland security efforts.</p>	<p>There are currently no key performance measures associated with this objective.</p>
	<p>4.2 Advance VA medical research and development 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.</p>	<p>Percent of research projects devoted to the Designated Research Areas</p>
	<p>4.3 Sustain partnerships with the academic community that enhance the quality of care to veterans and provide high quality education experiences for health care trainees.</p>	<p>There are currently no key performance measures associated with this objective.</p>
	<p>4.4 Enhance the socioeconomic well-being of veterans, and thereby the Nation and local communities, through veteran’s benefits; assistance programs for small, disadvantaged, and veteran-owned businesses; and other community initiatives.</p>	<p>There are currently no key performance measures associated with this objective.</p>
	<p>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.</p>	<p>Percent of respondents who rate national cemetery appearance as excellent</p>

VA supports the public health of the Nation as a whole through conducting medical research, offering medical education and training, and serving as a resource in the event of a national emergency or natural disaster. VA supports emergency management for the Nation by performing critical activities to improve the Nation's preparedness for response to war, terrorism, national emergencies, and natural disasters. VA supports the socioeconomic well being of the Nation through the provision of education, vocational rehabilitation, and home loan programs. VA preserves the memory and sense of patriotism of the Nation by maintaining our national cemeteries as national shrines, and hosting patriotic and commemorative events.

The following table identifies estimates of the total resources devoted to this strategic goal and its associated objectives:

Resources by Objective		
	FY 2004 Obligations	% of Total VA Resources
Total VA Resources	\$69,743	100%
Strategic Goal 4: Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being and history of the Nation.	\$1,030	2.1%
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 support to national, state, and local emergency management and homeland security efforts.		0%
4.2 Advance VA medical research and development 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.	\$476	0.7%
4.3 Sustain partnerships with the academic community that enhance the quality of care to veterans and provide high quality education experiences for health care trainees.	\$469	0.7%
4.4 Enhance the socioeconomic well-being of veterans, and thereby the Nation and local communities, through veteran's benefits; assistance programs for small, disadvantaged, and veteran-owned businesses; and other community initiatives.	\$1	0.0%
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.	\$84	0.1%

Improve Preparedness for Response to War, Terrorism, National Emergencies, and Natural Disasters

Strategic Goal: 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 support to national, state, and local emergency management and homeland security efforts.

Performance Goals

Emergency Response measures are not "key" measures but are used for assessing progress in this area.

- In 2004, at least 90 percent of VA Central Office-based top management officials, other key personnel, and emergency planners receive training or, as applicable, participate in exercises relevant to VA's Continuity of Operations (COOP) plan on the national level.
- In 2004, at least 85 percent of VA field-based top management officials, other key personnel, and emergency managers receive training or, as applicable, participate in exercises relevant to VA's COOP plan on the national level.

Current Situation Discussion

In response to the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent report of the Secretary's Preparedness Review Working Group, the Department is focusing on enhancing its capabilities in the area of emergency preparedness, operational readiness, security of VA facilities, and continuity of operations. Within this area, the Department is responsible for the following:

- Continuity of Operations Plans;
- Continuity of Government;
- VA-Department of Defense Contingency Hospital System;
- Federal Response Plan Emergency Support Functions (four);
- National Disaster Medical System;
- Radiologic Emergency Support;
- Homeland Security interagency coordination and support.

Many of these objectives enhance the Department's internal capabilities and its ability to ensure continuity of services to veterans and their families. These

objectives also improve VA's capacity as a force multiplier for the Federal response.

Means and Strategies

The first step in achieving this goal was the establishment of the Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness (OSP). It plays the leading role in ensuring that VA is prepared to handle any emergency situation and will be able to continue its operations and services to veterans and their families. This organization works with the Administrations to ensure the safety and security of veterans, employees, and visitors at VA facilities. It ensures continuity of services (except for continuity of IT services, which is under the purview of the VA CIO) while integrating, improving, and increasing VA's operational readiness and ability to support security and law enforcement, emergency responses, Department of Defense contingency hospital support, Federal Response Plan, and Homeland Security support missions.

Responsibilities of OSP include:

- Ensuring that operational readiness and emergency preparedness activities enhance VA's ability to continue its ongoing services (Continuity of Operations).
- Coordinating and executing emergency preparedness and crisis response activities both VA-wide and with other Federal, State, local, and relief agencies.
- Ensuring enforcement of the law and overseeing the protection of employees and veterans using VA facilities.
- Ensuring the security of VA's physical infrastructure and the security of classified/sensitive information in VA facilities (as opposed to cyber security of classified/sensitive information, which is the responsibility of the Office of Cyber Security).
- Developing Department-wide training programs that enhance VA's readiness, conducting exercises, and evaluating programs' preparedness.
- Developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of Defense (DoD), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of Justice, and other Federal agencies involved in emergency response, continuity of government, counter-terrorism, homeland defense, and National Security activities.

Crosscutting Activities

VA works with DHS, DoD, FEMA, and HHS in carrying out its responsibilities in responding to national emergencies and providing contingency hospital support to DoD.

Management Challenges

There are no significant management challenges that would impact achievement of this performance goal.

Data Source and Validation

Performance data are derived from training and exercise data, which will be collected on a periodic basis from the three Administrations. They are responsible for primary data collection.

Focus VA Medical Research and Development Programs

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

Objective 4.2: Advance VA medical research and development 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.

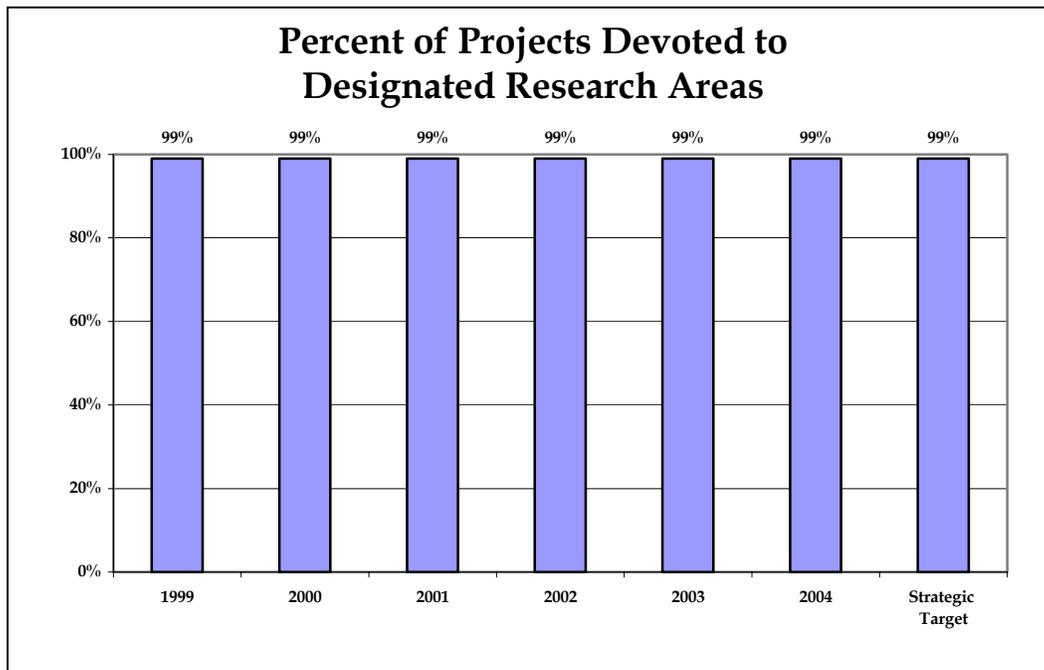
Performance Goal

The percentage of research projects devoted to the Designated Research Areas (DRAs) will equal or exceed 99 percent.

Definition: The numerator for the target is the number of VA funded research projects devoted to DRAs. The denominator is the total number of VA funded research projects.

Current Situation Discussion

In meeting its mission, the Office of Research and Development (ORD) has capitalized on the unique opportunities provided by the veterans health care system. ORD has realigned its priority areas to more appropriately target research projects that address the special needs of veteran patients. The program is also striving to balance research resources among basic and applied research to ensure a complementary role between the discovery of new knowledge and the application of these discoveries into medical practice.



VA's research portfolio of more than 2,200 funded projects has produced numerous discoveries that have improved the quality of health care for veterans and the American public. Virtually all of VA's research projects are directed toward health conditions relevant to the veteran population. While all VA research is relevant to veterans, the Designated Research Areas represent areas of particular importance to VA's veteran patient population. The DRAs are: Aging, Acute and Traumatic Injury, Sensory Loss, Health Systems, Special Populations, Military and Environmental Exposures, Emerging Pathogens/Bio-Terrorism, Mental Illness, Substance Abuse, Cancer, Heart Diseases, Lung Disorders, Kidney Diseases, Diabetes and Major Complications, Digestive Diseases, Infectious Diseases, and Other Chronic Diseases.

Significant research results include new or improved treatments, enhanced prosthetic devices, the discovery of genes that play key roles in the development of diseases, and improvements in the delivery of medical care.

For example, VA researchers in Iowa City are studying a form of a hepatitis virus that may prolong the life of patients with HIV. VA researchers in Seattle are developing new prosthetic limbs that will reduce patient fatigue and produce greater propulsive forces for walking. Clinician-investigators found that colonoscopy offered significant advantages over sigmoidoscopy and fecal blood tests in identifying colon cancer or serious precancerous growths. In a potentially major breakthrough for understanding and treating multiple sclerosis (MS), VA researchers in West Haven performed the first transplant of nerve cells in a patient suffering from that disease. The study may show whether cells from the body's peripheral nerves can safely repair MS-damaged cells in the brain and spinal cord. A study led by investigators in Minneapolis found that raising levels of high-density lipoproteins (HDL), the so-called "good" cholesterol, substantially reduces the incidence of stroke for some patients.

Means and Strategies

DRAs constitute the organizing principle for VA research and are defined as:

"...those areas of research in which VA has a particularly strong strategic interest because of the prevalence of conditions within the VA patient population, the uniqueness of a specific patient population and its disease burden to the VA system or the importance of the question to health care delivery within VA."

In other words, individual DRAs are the *subject areas* deemed most appropriate for VA research and, collectively, the set of DRAs defines the scope of VA's comprehensive research program. Because DRAs identify the major, rather broad categories of inquiry that are central to VA's research mission, they are expected to remain fairly stable over time; although scientific or other developments (including future strategic plans) will certainly lead to their periodic re-examination. Also, while the adoption of DRAs makes clear where

the vast majority of resources are to be directed, it does not rule out limited VA-sponsored research in other selected areas.

DRAs are conceptualized in a way that emphasizes the common interests and the synergy of VA's established research services. To accomplish this, ORD has developed a modified list of DRAs and has defined each in a way that is broad enough to encompass the disparate perspectives of biomedical and social scientists, clinicians, engineers, and others involved in VA research. Finally, to put VA's multiple research priorities into sharper focus, ORD has identified and defined a set of *Designated Research Elements* (DREs) and has adopted them as the *second dimension* of the conceptual framework.

"DREs are alternative approaches to studying VA-relevant subjects. They indicate the nature of the questions being addressed or the perspective from which the research questions are formulated and approached. They suggest the purpose of the research and the kind of information likely to result. Like DRAs, DREs mandate priorities for VA research."

DRAs and DREs form the conceptual framework for a unified program of VA research. Together, DRAs and DREs organize VA research and provide a:

- Comprehensive description of the kinds of research VA intends to support;
- System for describing research programs and projects already underway;
- System for identifying areas where more research may be needed.

The new conceptual framework illustrates the depth and breadth of VA research, its dependence on many disciplines and professions, and its grasp of the full continuum of basic to applied research. VA's support of biomedical, clinical, epidemiological, methodological, and behavioral research, as well as management studies and technology development and assessment, provides all the elements for a fully integrated research program. The new conceptual framework highlights VA's capacity for intradisciplinary research as well as capacity for exploring *connections* that are more difficult to study in other contexts (e.g., connections between basic biological processes and clinical manifestations, the interactions between physical and mental conditions, the link between discovery and implementation).

Crosscutting Activities

VA conducts an intramural research program. VA allocates appropriated funds to its facilities on the basis of nationally competitive scientific merit review to conduct research under the supervision of VA employees on high priority health care needs of veterans. Unlike the National Institutes of Health (NIH), VA does not make grants to universities, cities or states, or any other non-VA individuals or organizations. However, VA does carefully coordinate its research

activities with other Federal agencies and non-governmental organizations to leverage the benefits of its research portfolio to the nation's veteran population. For example, VA established a Research Working Group with the Departments of Defense and Health and Human Services to develop and execute an objective-oriented plan to research the health problems that some Gulf War veterans have experienced. Similarly, ORD coordinates research initiatives with the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and VA investigators obtain more than \$400 million annually in research grants from NIH and other agencies.

Major Management Challenges

There are no major management challenges that will affect achievement of this performance goal.

External Factors

External factors will not affect the achievement of this performance goal. Changes in Medical and Prosthetic Research appropriations affect only the magnitude of VA research; DRAs and selection criteria remain unchanged.

Data Source and Validation

The source of the data collection is analysis and self-reporting by VA medical centers.

Sustain Partnerships with Academic Community that Enhance the Quality of Health Care

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

Objective 4.3: Sustain partnerships with the academic community that enhance the quality of care to veterans and provide high quality education experiences for health care trainees.

Performance Goal

There are currently no key performance measures associated with this objective.

Current Situation Discussion

VA supports the public health of the Nation through medical education and training. One of the VA health care system's strategic objectives is to *Build Healthy Communities* by partnering with the academic community to provide clinical education experiences for medical residents and other health care trainees who successfully meet their learning objectives and enhance the quality of care provided to veterans within the VA health care system. VA has affiliations with over 100 medical schools and over 1,200 educational institutions.

Enhance Socioeconomic Well-Being of Veterans

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

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

Performance Goal

There are currently no key performance measures associated with this objective.

Current Situation Discussion

VA promotes business ownership through its Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the recently created Center for Veterans Enterprise. VA's program evaluation of the educational assistance programs demonstrated a positive return on investment of 2 to 1 in the form of increased income taxes for every dollar spent.

Maintain National Cemeteries as National Shrines

Strategic Goal: 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.

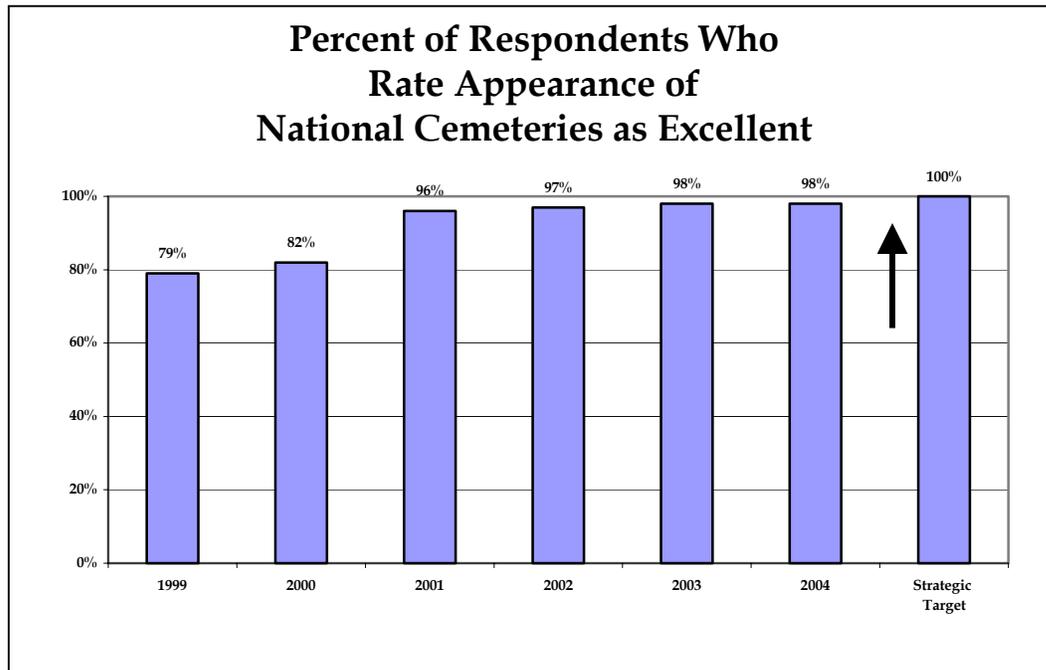
Performance Goal

The percent of respondents who rate national cemetery appearance as excellent will be 98 percent in 2004.

Definition: The measure is the number of survey respondents who agree or strongly agree that the overall appearance of the national cemetery is excellent divided by the total number of survey respondents, expressed as a percentage.

Current Situation Discussion

NCA will continue to maintain the appearance of 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). 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. National cemeteries are enduring testimonials to that appreciation and should be places to which veterans and their families are drawn for dignified burials and lasting memorials.



Each national cemetery exists as a national shrine and as such serves as an expression of the appreciation and respect of a grateful Nation for the service and sacrifice of her veterans. Each national shrine provides an enduring memorial to their service, as well as a dignified and respectful setting for their final rest.

National cemeteries also carry expectations of appearance that set them apart from private cemeteries. Our Nation is committed to create and maintain these sites as national shrines, transcending the provision of benefits to an individual. As national shrines, VA's cemeteries serve a purpose that continues long after burials have ceased and visits of families and loved ones have ended.

A national shrine is a place of honor and memory that declares to the visitor or family member who views it that within its majestic setting each and every veteran may find a sense of serenity, historic sacrifice, and nobility of purpose. Each visitor should depart feeling that the grounds, the gravesites, and the environs of the national cemetery are a beautiful and awe-inspiring tribute to those who gave much to preserve our Nation's freedom and way of life.

Means and Strategies

In order to achieve this performance goal, NCA must maintain occupied graves and developed acreage in a manner befitting national shrines. Improvements in the appearance of burial grounds and historic structures are necessary for NCA to fulfill the National Shrine Commitment. In-ground gravesites (casket and cremain) require maintenance to correct ground sinkage and to keep the headstones and markers aligned. Maintenance of columbaria includes cleaning stains from stone surfaces, maintaining the caulking and grouting between the units, and maintaining the surrounding walkways. Cemetery acres that have been developed into burial areas, as well as land that is no longer in a natural state, require regular maintenance. To assist in achieving this goal, NCA will continue its participation in a joint venture with VHA, under which national cemeteries provide therapeutic work opportunities to veterans receiving treatment in the Compensated Work Therapy/Veterans Industries program. In return for giving veterans the opportunity to work for pay, regain lost work habits, and learn new work skills, the national cemeteries are provided a supplemental work force that is valuable to maintaining national cemeteries as national shrines.

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 will serve as NCA's planning tool and as a reference guide to assist MSN directors, cemetery directors, and program managers in the task of reviewing and refining NCA operational standards and measures. This

work has already begun. When complete, the directory of standards will be published and linked to statements of policy and operational descriptions of processes through directives and handbooks.

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. Recommendations to address deferred maintenance issues or preventive steps to minimize future maintenance costs were also identified. NCA will use the information to address repair and maintenance needs at its national cemeteries.

All national cemeteries are important locations for patriotic and commemorative events. NCA will continue to host ceremonies and memorial services at national cemeteries to honor those who made the supreme sacrifice. To preserve our Nation's history, NCA will continue to conduct educational tours and programs for schools and civic groups.

Crosscutting Activities

NCA will continue its partnerships with various other federal and civic organizations that provide volunteers and other participants to assist in maintaining the appearance of national cemeteries. For example, an interagency agreement with the Bureau of Prisons provides for the use of selected prisoners to perform work at national cemeteries.

In spring 2002, NCA initiated its first comprehensive inventory of memorials located in more than 100 national cemetery properties across the country. Since national cemeteries were established in 1862, they have become the sites of memorials erected to recall distinctive heroics, group burials, and related commemorations. These memorials range from modest blocks of stone, sundials, and tablets affixed to boulders to more sophisticated obelisks and single soldiers on granite pedestals. To complete this inventory, NCA is partnering with Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS!), a non-profit organization with more than 10 years of experience using volunteers to survey public outdoor sculpture nationwide. In addition to gathering historical information about memorials, volunteers will document materials, dimensions, appearance, evidence of damage, and setting. The inventory will help NCA prioritize conservation needs as well as develop a maintenance plan for all its memorials. When the project is complete, the inventory data will reside at NCA as well as being publicly accessible online through another SOS! partner, the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

External Factors

Maintaining the grounds, graves, and grave markers of national cemeteries as national shrines is influenced by many different factors. As time goes by, cemeteries experience a variety of environmental changes that may require extensive maintenance. Extremes in weather, such as excessive rain or drought,

can result in or exacerbate sunken graves, sunken markers, soiled markers, inferior turf cover, and weathering of columbaria. For example, the 230-pound upright headstones and the 130-pound flat markers tend to settle over time and must be raised and realigned periodically. The frequency of this need varies depending on soil conditions and climate.

Major Management Challenges

There are no major management challenges that will affect achievement of this performance goal.

Data Source and Validation

From FY 1996 to FY 2000, the source of data used to measure the appearance of national cemeteries was the NCA Visitor Comment Card. Since 2001, an annual nationwide mail survey, Survey of Satisfaction with National Cemeteries, has been NCA's primary source of customer satisfaction data. The survey collects data annually from family members and funeral directors who have recently received services from a national cemetery. To ensure sensitivity to the grieving process, NCA allows a minimum of three months after an interment before including a respondent in the sample population. The measure for cemetery appearance is the percent of respondents who agree or strongly agree that the overall appearance of the national cemetery is excellent. This information provides a gauge to assess maintenance conditions at individual cemeteries as well as the overall system. The information obtained is analyzed to ensure that NCA addresses those issues most important to its customers. This approach provides data from the customer's perspective, which are critical to developing our objectives and associated measures.

The survey provides statistically valid performance information at the national and Memorial Service Network (MSN) level, and at the cemetery level for cemeteries with at least 400 interments per year. VA headquarters staff oversees the data collection process and provides an annual report at the national level. MSN and cemetery level reports are provided for NCA management's use.