

Objective 4.1

		FY 2004 Obligations (\$ in Millions)	% of Total VA Resources
Strategic Goal 4 Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.		\$1,039	1.5%
Objective	Performance Results		
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 percent of Group 1 emergency preparedness officials received training or, as applicable, participated in exercises relevant to VA's COOP plan on the national level (goal was 85 percent) • 42 percent of Group 2 emergency preparedness officials received training or, as applicable, participated in exercises relevant to VA's COOP plan on the national level (goal was 75 percent) 	<\$1M	<0.1%

Performance

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs consolidated the Department's emergency preparedness and security and law enforcement oversight within the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning, and Preparedness. Organizationally, the emergency preparedness functions fall under the Director of Operations and Readiness and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Security and Law Enforcement. The office ensures that VA has effective emergency preparedness programs and policies in place across the Nation and oversees the development of effective Continuity of Government and Continuity of Operations (COOP) plans for VA. The office acts as the VA liaison on preparedness with other Federal agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Defense. The office develops, implements, and evaluates preparedness training and exercises. It also assesses the interaction

between VA's preparedness plans and those of other Federal, state, and local governments and relief organizations. In addition, the office manages, directs, and ensures readiness and staffing of VA's operations centers, coordinates VA's staffing at other agencies' operations centers, and supports VA's Crisis Response Team. The office maintains the VA-wide police and security program; trains all newly hired VA police officers; protects veterans, visitors, and employees at VA headquarters; provides personal security for the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs commensurate with the threat level; and coordinates security background investigations and determines access eligibility to classified information.

During FY 2004 the following emergency management activities were completed:

- Developed individual contingency plans in case of terrorist attack or other disruption for the Super Bowl,

State of the Union Address, opening of the World War II Memorial, 4th of July, Democratic National Convention, and Republican National Convention.

- Conducted an internal exercise, called COOPx, as an orientation for senior VA leadership.
- Conducted an internal tabletop COOP exercise for staff at the Department's mirror site.
- Participated in Exercise Forward Challenge, a national exercise designed to test continuity of operations plans. The Department deployed almost 100% of its Continuity of Operations team.
- Participated in Exercise Determined Promise and TOPOFF 3 tabletop exercise.
- Completed procurement of 143 pharmaceutical caches located in medical centers.
- Completed decontamination/hazmat training and equipping of the 78 medical centers determined to be the highest priority. Initiated training and equipping for a second group of approximately 50 facilities – expected to be completed by the end of calendar year 2004.

The Department was on track to achieve its goal of training for 75 percent of Group 2 (field) emergency preparedness officials, but the premature departure of senior leaders who had received the training derailed that progress. Permanent replacements are expected to receive the required training in late calendar year 2004.

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

There are no PART evaluations that have been completed, nor are there any planned, that specifically address Objective 4.1.

Major Management Challenges

VA's Office of Inspector General has identified the following issue as a major management challenge related to Objective 4.1 (the program's response to the challenge may be found on the pages referenced below):

- Security and safety – research and hospital facilities need to be diligent in maintaining security and physical

access controls for areas storing high risk or sensitive materials (refer to pages 234-235 for more information).

The Government Accountability Office has identified the following issue as a major management challenge related to Objective 4.1 (the program's response to the challenge may be found on the pages referenced below):

- Prepare for biological and chemical acts of terrorism – VA determined that it needs to stockpile pharmaceuticals and improve its decontamination and security capabilities (refer to pages 258-259 for more information).

Program Evaluations

An independent contractor conducted assessments at more than 100 "most critical infrastructure" sites crucial to continuity of Departmental operations or of national importance. These assessments evaluated facility vulnerabilities relating to disaster threats and other major emergencies. Facilities are now addressing some of the vulnerabilities that were identified, and longer term capital improvement projects will help resolve many of the other vulnerabilities.

Another study is underway that will assess the emergency preparedness of VA medical facilities in case of an all-hazards or weapons of mass destruction event. This study is being conducted to provide a comprehensive, independent, and current assessment of our hospital system's capabilities. The study is examining medical center preparation in areas such as pharmaceutical caches, patient capacity, isolation and decontamination, and staffing. The results, expected in 2005, will assist VA in focusing its efforts to improve related policies, programming, and training efforts in our medical centers.

New Policies and Procedures

The Department has re-written its Comprehensive Emergency Management Program to adhere to requirements established in Federal Preparedness Circular 65. This program provides policy and

procedures for developing internal continuity of operations plans. It also governs the headquarters test, training, and exercise program, and sets out responsibilities of the Crisis Response Team, a group of representatives within the Department that meets twice weekly, or more often if the need arises, e.g., during hurricane season.

Policies governing the Department's Line of Succession are in place, as are procedures for the Department's participation in its classified Continuity of Government role. The Department has helped draft the forthcoming National Response Plan, which will govern the Department's role as a support agency in times of emergency.

Objective 4.2

		FY 2004 Obligations (\$ in Millions)	% of Total VA Resources
Strategic Goal 4 Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.		\$1,039	1.5%
Objective	Performance Results		
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.	Increased to 229 the number of Career Development Awardees (goal was 237)	\$452	0.6%

Performance

The mission of the VA Research and Development Program (R&D), which supports Objective 4.2, is to discover knowledge and create innovations that advance the health and care of veterans and the Nation. Today, as in the past, VA is sharing research discoveries with health care providers throughout the Nation. VA R&D pursues collaborative opportunities to be cost efficient and effective in addressing veteran health care needs, and carefully coordinates its research activities with other Federal agencies and non-governmental organizations to ensure the benefits of its research

activities to veterans. In FY 2004, VA designed and implemented a total of 229 career development programs for all four services: Bio-medical Laboratory Science, Health Services Research, Rehabilitation Research, and Clinical Service. The career development program specifically supports clinicians for a period of concentrated research training with limited non-research responsibilities. VA's research program made many discoveries that moved the Department closer to achieving the ultimate aim of Objective 4.2. For example, VA researchers:

- Identified a link between service in the Gulf War and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

- Determined that using the anti-convulsive drug, divalproex, in combination with either of two commonly used anti-psychotic drugs, results in decreased suffering and shorter hospital stays for schizophrenia patients.
- Developed a DNA vaccine technology and successfully demonstrated the efficacy of such vaccines against the intracellular bacterial pathogen, *Listeria monocytogenes*.
- Identified a synthetic compound that reverses bone loss in mice without affecting the reproductive system, which may lead to new treatments to prevent osteoporosis for millions of people and lead to safer alternatives than current hormone treatment protocols.

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

During the development of the FY 2005 budget, the Administration conducted a PART review of the R&D program, which is essential to the accomplishment of Objective 4.2. The assessment demonstrated that the VA R&D program has a clearly defined purpose and is well managed. In addition, the Administration reiterated the importance of the VA R&D program as the only medical research program focused on veterans' health issues. However, this program received a rating of "Results Not Demonstrated," due mainly to a lack of documented ambitious goals and performance measures that accurately assess the strengths and weaknesses of the program. To address this concern, VA has developed several new performance measures that will be included in future budgets and reports.

Major Management Challenges

Neither VA's Office of Inspector General nor the Government Accountability Office identified any major management challenges related to Objective 4.2.

Program Evaluations

There have not been any independent program evaluations conducted recently that specifically address Objective 4.2.

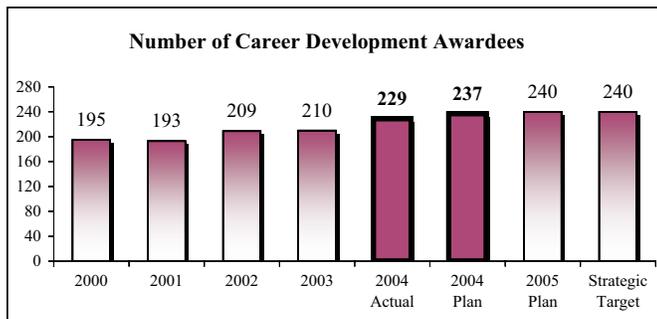
New Policies and Procedures

Several new policies and procedures have been implemented in the recent past that highlight our focus on medical research in support of Objective 4.2. For example, VA:

- Implemented a new technology transfer program that allows the Department to take the lead in disseminating new discoveries and inventions made by VA researchers.
- Developed an inter-institutional agreement giving universities unimpeded access and authority to patent and market intellectual property on VA's behalf as well as theirs.
- Strengthened oversight of human research protocols.
- Completed training for compliance officers in human subjects protection and for administrative officers in finance and administration to ensure that all responsible R&D staff are aware of, and adhere to, VA and other Federal regulations.
- Established a forum with DoD to share best practices in health research and development methods.

Objective 4.2 — Key Performance Goal

Achieve 237 Career Development Awardees.



Description, Importance, and Results

VHA supports the public health of the Nation as a whole through medical research. The objective of the career development program is to build and maintain the number of VA clinicians who can conduct research in areas of high relevance to the health care of veterans. Focusing on career development awardees improves the overall caliber and number of researchers and ensures the continuation of this high-caliber program. The performance measure target is an annual count of all the career development awardees in each of the four services of the VA research and development program: Bio-medical Laboratory Science, Health Services Research, Rehabilitation Research, and Clinical Science. We have achieved 229 career development awardees. VA has continued to increase the number of awardees since 2001.

Management and Policy Issues

VHA's primary strategy to implement this strategic objective will be to focus research efforts on veterans' special health care needs. VA will maintain the

proportion of research funding directed to projects addressing veteran-related issues. VA will conduct medical research that leads to demonstrable improvements in the lives of veterans, their families, and the general public. The established designated research areas on which VA-sponsored research will be conducted include Aging, Chronic Disease, Mental Illness, Substance Abuse, Sensory Loss, Trauma-Related Illness, Health Systems, Special Populations, and Military Occupations and Environmental Exposure. We will incorporate veterans' military history and potential consequences of service into the Clinical Patient Record System (CPRS). VA will develop, distribute, and promote orientation videos for incoming medical house staff and other health care trainees. Much of the research conducted in VA facilities is subject to the regulations of other Federal agencies as well as VA's own regulations. VA works closely with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Department of Health and Human Services on joint studies funded by NIH. Similarly, VA works closely with the Food and Drug Administration on human studies funded by pharmaceutical companies in support of a new drug or device application. Achievement of this performance goal is partly contingent on the cooperation of other government and non-government agencies VA partners with on some research projects.

Data Quality

Please refer to the Key Measures Data Table on page 136.

Objective 4.3

		FY 2004 Obligations (\$ in Millions)	% of Total VA Resources
Strategic Goal 4 Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.		\$1,039	1.5%
Objective	Performance Results		
4.3 Sustain partnerships with the academic community that enhance the quality of care to veterans and provide high-quality educational experiences for health care trainees.	On a scale of 0-100, medical residents and other trainees scored their clinical training experience in VA at 83 (goal was 82)	\$493	0.7%

Performance

VA is the largest provider of health care training in the United States. The Department conducts an education and training program for health professions students and residents that enhances the quality of care provided to veteran patients within the VHA health care system.

VA's graduate medical education is conducted through affiliations with university schools of medicine. Each year some 28,000 medical residents and 16,000 medical students receive part of their clinical training in VHA facilities through affiliations with 107 of the Nation's 126 medical schools and over 1,200 educational institutions. VA supports 8,800 physician resident positions in almost 2,000 university programs accredited by the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education.

VA is a leader in the training of associated health professionals. Through affiliations with over 1,200 individual health professions schools and colleges, some 32,000 associated health students receive training in VA facilities each year. Clinical training and fellowships are provided to students in more than 40 professions, including nurses, pharmacists, dentists, audiologists, dietitians, social workers, psychologists, physical therapists, optometrists, nuclear medicine technologists,

physician assistants, respiratory therapists, and nurse practitioners. In FY 2004, physician residents and other clinical trainees gave a score of 83 (on a scale of 0-100) to their VA clinical training experience, which is a good indicator that the Department is moving closer to achieving the primary aim of Objective 4.3.

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

The PART evaluation conducted by the Administration during the development of the FY 2005 budget reviewed the medical care program. Medical education is part of the medical care program; however, the PART evaluation did not specifically cover any aspects of medical education as it relates to the accomplishment of Objective 4.3.

Major Management Challenges

Neither VA's Office of Inspector General nor the Government Accountability Office identified any major management challenges related to Objective 4.3.

Program Evaluations

There have not been any independent program evaluations conducted recently that address Objective 4.3.

New Policies and Procedures

VA has conducted a Learners' Perceptions (LP) Survey of physician residents and clinical trainees every year since 2001. New policies and procedures have been established to enhance the process of conducting the survey and disseminating the results to assist in improving the clinical training experience. For example:

- VHA Directive 2003-032, Clinical Trainee Registration, was published on June 17, 2003, which mandated every clinical trainee to be registered via *VistA*, New Person File. This allows VA to contact trainees to complete the LP Survey and improve response rate.

- In FY 2004, the LP Survey questionnaire was changed from a paper to a Web-based questionnaire. This new process reduced survey administration costs and improved the feedback process to VA facilities.
- The results of the survey are e-mailed to each VISN along with facility-specific reports, which include comparative results of the past two surveys by type of trainee. The reports include information about the purpose, background, methodology used, and major learning domains. In addition, facility highlights are provided to assist management in identifying areas for improvements. The reports are also made available on the Web.

Objective 4.4

		FY 2004 Obligations (\$ in Millions)	% of Total VA Resources
Strategic Goal 4 Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.		\$1,039	1.5%
Objective	Performance Results		
4.4 Enhance the socioeconomic well-being of veterans, and thereby the Nation and local communities, through veterans' benefits; assistance programs for small, disadvantaged, and veteran-owned businesses; and other community initiatives.	Statutory Goal: 23 percent of total procurement dollars to be spent on small business* *Data unavailable due to migration to new reporting system (Federal Procurement Data System—Next Generation)	<\$1M	<0.1%

Performance

The purpose of Objective 4.4 is to fully utilize veterans' benefits and other business assistance programs to enhance the socioeconomic well-being of the Nation and its veterans. The array of benefits and services provided by VA has a direct impact on the lives of veterans and beneficiaries. Each benefit program has

specific outcomes used to assess program results. For example, the housing program assists veterans with purchasing homes and this has a positive impact on the national economy. The delivery of health care benefits and services has a positive effect on the overall well-being of the Nation and can facilitate longer, more productive lives for veterans.

VA's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) administers the Department's small business program and serves as the Secretary's representative on small business issues, ensuring compliance with the Small Business Act, which requires all departments and agencies to establish with the Small Business Administration annual procurement goals for prime contract and subcontract awards to small businesses, small disadvantaged businesses, small women-owned businesses, Section 8(a) small business concerns, HUBZone small businesses, and especially service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses. Although actual data for FY 2004 were unavailable at the time this report was prepared, every indicator suggests VA exceeded the statutory small business goal of 23 percent. OSDBU has responded to many changes in public laws affecting small business programs. Through reorganization, business process reengineering, utilization of information technology resources, and electronic commerce, OSDBU continues to provide high-quality support to the small business community ensuring equitable opportunities. In FY 2004, OSDBU extended its outreach and training programs with the use of video teleconferencing capabilities.

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

There are no PART evaluations that have been completed, nor are there any planned, that specifically address Objective 4.4.

Major Management Challenges

Neither VA's Office of Inspector General nor the Government Accountability Office identified any major management challenges related to Objective 4.4.

Program Evaluations

In 2000 the Department published the results of an independent program evaluation of VA's education programs. The principal finding of this evaluation was that the Department's primary education programs for

veterans and reservists showed some success in meeting the intended purposes of the legislation establishing these programs, and that they returned over \$2 to the economy for every \$1 in taxpayer money funding the 2-year and 4-year degree programs. Compared to those who have not taken advantage of the education program, the men and women who furthered their education with government support have lower unemployment, have increased career and education goals, and enjoy an earnings advantage. In addition, one-half of the users of the education program believe they could not have pursued their education without the education benefits provided by the Department's program. This independent evaluation also recommended that the level of VA education program benefits be raised, which the Department has successfully achieved through close collaboration with the Administration and Congress.

New Policies and Procedures

In support of Objective 4.4, VA continues to provide accurate and timely information to the small business community on how, what, when, and where VA purchases goods and services. This is done through print and electronic formats. The Department also participates in procurement conferences and sessions to train small businesses on VA's acquisition process and systems. VA continues to make personnel aware of the Department's responsibilities to support small business through VA's acquisition program.

In an effort to improve accomplishments in the important Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business socioeconomic category, VA became the first Federal organization to implement provisions of Public Law 108-183, the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003. This law, signed by the President on December 16, 2003, authorizes government contracting officers to limit competition on Federal acquisition to Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses, and in certain situations, to award contracts to Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses on a sole source basis. Contracting officers

now have a set-aside mechanism to aid in achieving the statutory 3 percent goal contained in Public Law 106-50, the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999. On May 5, 2004, the provisions of the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 were implemented as an Interim Rule in the Federal Acquisition Regulation.

In March 2004, VA implemented an important initiative from the President's Small Business Agenda concerning contract bundling. Contract bundling is the combining of multiple contracts normally awarded to small businesses into larger single contracts that are frequently unsuitable for award to small businesses, thus reducing the number of contract dollars awarded to small businesses. Implementing regulations for this change required executive civilian departments and agencies to conduct contract bundling reviews for all acquisitions of \$2 million or greater to ensure acquisitions are not bundled, and where contract bundling occurs, that it is necessary and justified in terms of measurably substantial benefits. VA set a lower threshold for contract reviews of \$1 million in order to achieve maximum efficacy.

In June 2002, the VA Procurement Executive and the Director of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization established the Veteran-Owned (VO) and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned (SDVO) Small Business Task Force to develop strategies to help VA attain procurement goals in these two important socioeconomic categories. The task force ultimately identified 5 goals and made 16 recommendations with action steps to improve VA's VO and SDVO small business accomplishments. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs approved the task force's report in March 2003. A number of recommendations were implemented in FY 2004. Chief among them were incorporating VA's goals for VO and SDVO small businesses into the performance plans of executives, managers, and staff who have contracting authority, take part in procurement actions, or oversee employees engaged in these activities, and issuing policy guidance on preference and special procedures to enhance VO and SDVO small business participation in VA acquisitions. (The report may be viewed and downloaded at: <http://www.vetbiz.gov/library/report.pdf>.)

Objective 4.5

		FY 2004 Obligations (\$ in Millions)	% of Total VA Resources
Strategic Goal 4 Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.		\$1,039	1.5%
Objective	Performance Results		
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.	Increased the percent of respondents who rated national cemetery appearance as excellent to 98 percent (goal was 98 percent)	\$94	0.1%

Performance

Our Nation is committed to create and maintain national cemeteries as national shrines that serve as an expression of the appreciation and respect of a grateful Nation for the service and sacrifice of her veterans. Each national cemetery exists as a national shrine and as such provides an enduring memorial to their service, as well as a dignified and respectful setting for their final rest. In FY 2004, VA met its primary performance goal related to Objective 4.5 as 98 percent of survey respondents rated national cemetery appearance as excellent. Cemetery appearance goals are set high in keeping with the expectations of all visitors.

VA 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. The willingness to recommend the national cemetery to veteran families during their time of need is an expression of loyalty toward that national cemetery. In FY 2004, 97 percent of survey respondents indicated they would recommend the national cemetery to veteran families during their time of need.

To ensure the appearance of national cemeteries meets the standards our Nation expects of its national shrines, VA performed a wide variety of grounds management functions, which included raising, realigning, and cleaning headstones to ensure uniform height and spacing and to improve appearance. The appearance of headstones, markers, and niche covers is of paramount importance to the appearance of national cemeteries as national shrines. The rows of pristine, white headstones that are set at the proper height and correct alignment provide the vista that is the hallmark

of many VA national cemeteries. In FY 2004, VA collected baseline data that showed that 64 percent of headstones and/or markers in national cemeteries are at the proper height and alignment, and that 76 percent of headstones, markers, and niche covers are clean and free of debris or objectionable accumulations. National Shrine Commitment projects were initiated at 15 national cemeteries, including 8 that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These projects will raise, realign, and clean over 186,000 headstones and markers and renovate gravesites in more than 176 acres. While attending to these highly visible aspects of our national shrines, VA also maintained roads, drives, parking lots, and walks; painted buildings, fences, and gates; and repaired roofs, walls, and irrigation and electrical systems.

VA continued its partnerships with various VA 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. Under a joint venture with VHA, national cemeteries provide therapeutic work opportunities to veterans receiving treatment in the Compensated Work Therapy/Veterans Industries program. The national cemeteries are provided a supplemental workforce while giving veterans the opportunity to work for pay, regain lost work habits, and learn new work skills.

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

During the development of the FY 2004 budget, the Administration conducted a PART evaluation of VA's burial program that relates to the accomplishment of Objective 4.5. Due to its clear mission and outcome goals, this program received a "Moderately Effective" rating.

The evaluation included findings that VA needed to adopt more performance measures to address all burial

benefits and the National Shrine Commitment, and to strengthen methods to link performance, budget, and accountability. VA has addressed these findings by introducing two new burial claims measures and two new measures for the National Shrine Commitment in the President's FY 2005 budget. VA may add additional measures for the National Shrine Commitment in future budgets. During FY 2004, VA collected baseline data for the new measures. In addition, VA has established the Organizational Assessment and Improvement Program for the national cemeteries. The program will strengthen accountability at the national cemeteries by assessing cemetery performance against operational standards and measures. The program will also strengthen the link between budget and performance by identifying improvement opportunities for prioritizing resources and by providing a scorecard for performance reporting at each of the national cemeteries.

Major Management Challenges

Neither VA's Office of Inspector General nor the Government Accountability Office identified any major management challenges related to Objective 4.5.

Program Evaluations

The Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act, Public Law 106-117, directed VA to contract for an independent study to look at various issues related to the National Shrine Commitment and its focus on cemetery appearance. Volume 3: Cemetery Standards of Appearance was published in March 2002. This report served as a planning tool and reference guide in the task of reviewing and refining VA's operational standards and measures.

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

New Policies and Procedures

Using the recommendations in Volume 3: Cemetery Standards of Appearance and building on previous efforts, VA has established standards and measures to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of operations at its national cemeteries. These standards and measures identify performance expectations in key operational processes including interments, grounds maintenance, and headstones and markers. VA has established the Organizational Assessment and Improvement Program to identify and prioritize continuous improvement opportunities, and to enhance program accountability by providing managers and staff at all levels with one "scorecard" related to the burial program. As part of the program, assessment teams drawn from national cemeteries, Memorial Service Networks, and VA Central Office staff in Washington, DC, will conduct site visits to all national cemeteries on a rotating basis to validate performance reporting. In FY 2004, the team conducted six site visits.

VA opened the National Cemetery Administration Training Center, establishing the first formal training program for the development of employees who manage and operate VA national cemeteries. The center will provide employees with the training necessary to continue to provide high-quality service to veterans and their families and to maintain our national cemeteries as national shrines. Initially focused on training cemetery directors and assistant directors, the new facility will eventually expand its classes to train foremen, equipment operators, grounds keepers, cemetery representatives, and other employees. As 11 new national cemeteries become operational, the center will ensure consistency in operations throughout the national cemetery system as well as a high-performing workforce and well-trained staff for key positions.

VA is partnering with the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT), an office of the National Park Service (NPS), to conduct research on the methods to clean historic headstones and

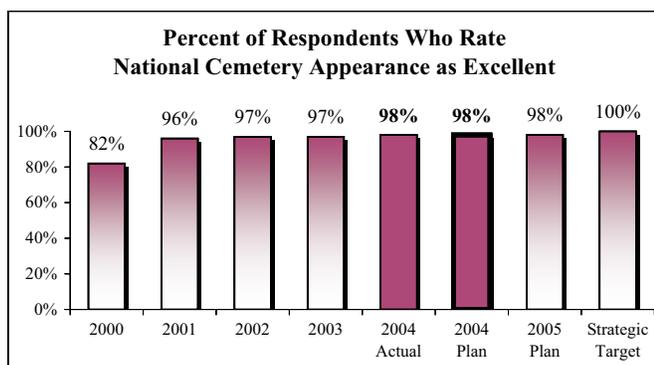
markers. After VA, NPS has the largest number of national cemeteries, including Gettysburg National Cemetery, under its jurisdiction. Under a 2-year interagency agreement, NCPTT will identify alternatives for cleaning historic headstones and markers.

In FY 2004, VA launched a Web-based (Internet) Nationwide Gravesite Locator (NGL) system. This innovation will make it easier for anyone with Internet access to search for the gravesite locations of deceased

family members and friends, and to conduct genealogical research. The nationwide grave locator contains more than 3 million records of veterans and dependents buried in VA's 120 cemeteries since the Civil War. It also has records of some burials in state veterans' cemeteries and burials in Arlington National Cemetery from 1999 to the present. Making burial locations more accessible may bring more visitors to the honored resting places that VA considers national shrines and historical treasures.

Objective 4.5 — Key Performance Goal

Increase the percent of respondents who rate national cemetery appearance as excellent to 98 percent in 2004.



Description, Importance, and Results

Our Nation is committed to create and maintain national cemeteries as national shrines that serve as an expression of the appreciation and respect of a grateful Nation for the service and sacrifice of her veterans. Each national cemetery exists as a national shrine and as such provides an enduring memorial to their service as well as a dignified and respectful setting for their final rest. VA met its goal as 98 percent of survey respondents rated cemetery appearance as excellent.

Management and Policy Issues

To ensure the appearance of national cemeteries meets the standards our Nation expects of its national shrines,

VA performed a wide variety of grounds management functions, which included raising, realigning, and cleaning headstones and renovating turf. VA initiated National Shrine Commitment projects at 15 national cemeteries. These projects will raise, realign, and clean over 186,000 headstones and markers and renovate gravesites in more than 176 acres. VA also maintained roads, parking lots, and walks; painted buildings, fences, and gates; and repaired roofs, walls, and irrigation and electrical systems.

The appearance of national cemeteries is influenced by many different external factors. Over time, 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.

To ascertain how our customers and stakeholders perceive the appearance of national cemeteries, VA will continue to seek feedback through annual surveys and focus groups. This information is used to determine

expectations for cemetery appearance as well as specific improvement opportunities and training needs.

VA continued its partnerships with various civic organizations that provide volunteers and other participants to assist in maintaining the appearance of national cemeteries. An agreement with the Bureau of

Prisons provided for the use of selected prisoners as a supplemental source of labor to assist in maintaining the national cemeteries.

Data Quality

Please refer to the Key Measures Data Table on page 136.

Objective E-1

		FY 2004 Obligations (\$ in Millions)	% of Total VA Resources
Enabling Goal Deliver world-class service to veterans and their families by applying sound business principles that result in effective management of people, communications, technology, and governance.		\$898	1.3%
Objective	Performance Results		
E-1 Recruit, develop, and retain a competent, committed, and diverse workforce that provides high-quality service to veterans and their families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased to 90 percent the proportion of employees who were aware that alternate dispute resolution (ADR) is an option for addressing workplace disputes (goal was 80 percent) Increased to 60 percent the proportion of cases using ADR techniques (goal was 70 percent) 	\$81	0.1%

Performance

Employees are VA's foundation and are the key to our ability to deliver timely and high-quality benefits and services. In support of Objective E-1, the Department has placed a high priority on implementing strategies to ensure VA recruits, retains, and develops a quality and diverse workforce to serve veterans and their families. Our primary roadmap for achieving this objective is the Department's Strategic Human Capital Management Plan, which presents an overview of past and projected workforce trends and summaries of workforce plans

developed by VA's program and staff offices. VA has moved closer to the ultimate aim of Objective E-1 by implementing initiatives covering a multitude of topics outlined in these plans. One indicator of our success is measured by the fact that in FY 2004, 73 percent of employees responded favorably when surveyed about their job satisfaction, a share up markedly from the 57 percent recorded 3 years earlier. VA has hired hundreds of new decision-makers to help reduce the claims backlog and trained these and other employees in proper claims processing procedures. We also developed a legislative proposal, signed into law in