



VETERANS
FLORIDA

Annual Report

2024

Veterans Florida Headquarters
3301 Thomasville Road Suite 101
Tallahassee, FL 32308

850-296-8116
veteransflorida.org

Table of Contents

Introduction from the Chair	1
Board of Directors	3
Meet The Team	9
Veterans Employment and Training Services Program	13
Financial Summary	21
Outlook	27

TO: The Governor of the State of Florida, Members of the Cabinet, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives

December 1, 2024

Dear Distinguished Leaders,

It is my honor to present the **Veterans Florida Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023-24**, marking the completion of our ninth full year of service. As outlined in Florida Statute, our mission remains steadfast: to attract and retain veterans and their families, encouraging them to make Florida their permanent home.

Our nationwide, veteran-focused marketing campaign continues to expand its impact, drawing **more than 240,000 new visitors to our website** with the support of our marketing partnership with Visit Florida. These veterans receive valuable information on the benefits and opportunities Florida offers. Our growing reach is reflected in increased social media engagement and the successful connection of more than 3,000 veterans with career assistance, training programs, educational opportunities, and job placements.

The **Florida SkillBridge Initiative** continues to lead the way in creating opportunities for transitioning servicemembers nationwide. By establishing Florida as a premier destination for military families, the program supports employers with a pipeline of highly skilled talent. Since 2020, the SkillBridge Program has directly benefited more than **200 servicemembers**, further solidifying Florida's leadership in veteran support.

The **Veterans Florida Workforce Training Grant Program** remains a cornerstone of our efforts. Since its inception, it has partnered with over **120 businesses**, resulting in the hiring and training of more than **1,700 veterans**. These veterans have collectively earned salaries exceeding **\$55 million**, contributing significantly to Florida's economy.

Our **Entrepreneurship Program**, launched in 2016, has provided resources and training to more than **6,340 veterans**, supporting the growth of **1,411 veteran-owned businesses** and strengthening Florida's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The Board of Directors and staff of Veterans Florida are deeply committed to delivering on these critical objectives in a transparent and cost-effective manner. We recognize the responsibility entrusted to us as stewards of taxpayer resources. I am proud of the progress we have achieved and our daily efforts to assist veterans who are considering Florida as their new home.

Looking ahead, we are enthusiastic about the future of this program as we continue to serve, attract, educate, and train veterans, helping them and their families to build successful lives here in Florida.

Sincerely,



Robert Kirila

Chair, Veterans Florida Board of Directors

CC: James Hartsell, Executive Director, Florida Department of Veterans Affairs

Board of Directors for Fiscal Year 2023-24

Appointed by the Governor



Warren R. "Rocky" McPherson

Rocky McPherson retired after serving for 10 years as the Vice President, Military and Defense programs, Enterprise Florida, Inc.—a public/private agency responsible for economic development initiatives in Florida. Rocky previously served five years as the Executive Director at Florida Department of Veterans Affairs. Rocky served on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom Veterans and families.

Rocky is a Vietnam veteran who served in combat, both as an Infantry Officer and carrier-based Naval Aviator flying the A6E. Rocky held key leadership roles during his Marine career as the Deputy Director, Marine Personnel Management Division; Chief of Staff, III Marine Expeditionary Force, and as a Group Commander, Marine Aviation Training Group, NAS Whidbey Island.

Rocky is a 1966 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, and holds a Master of Political Science degree from Auburn University. Rocky is also a graduate of the National War College in Washington, DC. He was named to the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame, Class of 2015. Rocky and his wife, Connie, reside in Yulee, Florida.

Governor Ron DeSantis reappointed Rocky in 2022.



Jeff M. Cathey, Vice Chair

Jeff M. Cathey served as Head, Military and Veteran Affairs for Bank of America, retiring in 2022.

Leading the Military Banking Overseas Division, Jeff was responsible for managing and executing the military banking contract with the Department of Defense. He led a 600+ global person team, headquartered in San Antonio, TX, to ensure banking services and products were readily available, through 62 financial centers and a robust ATM network, to servicemembers deployed in ten countries in Europe, Asia, and around the globe.

As Head of Military Affairs, Jeff led a dedicated group focused on support of active-duty military and their families, and successful reintegration of servicemembers into the civilian sector. He was responsible for business development and engagement in the Washington, DC arena and nationally. His team was integral in exploring marketing and philanthropic opportunities, as well as events supporting the military community worldwide.

Cathey joined Bank of America in April 2008 directly from the Pentagon. Jeff served with distinction in the U.S. Navy for 29 years, and led commands worldwide at all levels to include two fleet squadrons and a carrier air wing in USS Enterprise. Captain Cathey flew 100 combat missions

and is a decorated veteran of Operation Urgent Fury, Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan), and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Jeff also served in Washington as Director for Senate Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Raised in Tampa, Jeff played football at the University of Tampa and earned his Bachelor of Arts finance degree from the University of South Florida. He earned a Master's Degree in National Security and Strategic Studies at the Naval War College. Jeff serves on the board of directors for Veterans Florida and Our Community Salutes. He is currently a student, a recent adjunct professor at the University of South Florida, and an umpire. He is married with three adult children.

Governor Ron DeSantis appointed Jeff to the Veterans Florida Board of Directors in 2022.



Mark Harden

Mark Harden served in the U.S. Navy for 30 years and retired as a Chief of Naval Operations Directed Master Chief. Mark also retired after 15 years as Director of the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society in Pensacola. His passion is working on programs that support Veterans and Active Duty military personnel and their families.

Actively engaged in the community in various capacities, Mark is the current National Judge Advocate for Navy League of the United States, is an officer of the Executive Committee and is on the Board of Directors. He co-founded and chairs the Pensacola Veteran Support Organization Network which is a clearinghouse of more than 40 veteran support organizations that work together to solve local veteran and military needs. Mark is a graduate of the Leadership Pensacola program where he has held a variety of leadership posts, including Chairman and President of the Alumni Association. Mark is currently a Rotarian and has served on the Board of Directors, and completed 3 years as their Program Chair.

Governor Ron DeSantis reappointed Mark in 2022.

Appointed by the Senate President



Garrett Richter

Garrett Richter is the Florida Market President of First Foundation Bank. He previously served as the founder, President, CEO and director of First Florida Integrity Bank, and the President and a director of TGR Financial, Inc., the bank's holding company.

His banking career began at Mellon Bank in February 1969. His employment with Mellon Bank was interrupted when he entered the Army in November 1969. He was awarded a Bronze Star, the Combat Infantry Badge and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry while serving in Vietnam with the 75th Ranger Company from 1970-71.

Garrett was elected to the Florida Legislature in 2006. He served one term in the Florida House of Representatives, followed by two terms in the Florida Senate where he was the President Pro Tempore from 2012 to 2016. During his tenure in the Florida Senate, he chaired the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee, the Senate Gaming Committee and the Ethics and Elections Committee. Garrett served as the chairman of the Florida Defense Support Task Force from 2015-2016, working to protect and enhance Florida's military missions and installations.

He is the past chairman of the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce and is an alumnus and past Board of Regents member of Leadership Florida, and past chairman of Leadership Collier. He served as director of FHLBank Atlanta from 2019 – 2021. Garrett was previously appointed to the Florida Ethics Commission by then Governor Rick Scott.

He is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh and the Graduate School of Banking in Madison, Wisconsin. Garrett has been married to Diana for 49 years and has three children and six grandchildren.

Senate President Kathleen Passidomo appointed Garrett to the Veterans Florida Board in 2023.



Angela Drzewiecki, Secretary

Angela Drzewiecki is a consultant at GrayRobinson, where she brings more than a decade of experience in government relations. She has successfully advocated for municipalities, trade associations, non-profits, and businesses before Florida's executive and legislative branches. Angela focuses her practice on a myriad of issues, including local government matters, transportation, public safety, and legislative appropriations.

Angela attended Florida State University where she earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science as well as a Master's degree in Applied American Politics and Policy.

As a Gold Star family member and military spouse, Angela brings a unique perspective and valuable insight to the Veterans Florida Board.

Angela was appointed to the Veterans Florida Board in 2019 and Senate President Kathleen Passidomo reappointed her in 2023.



Lynda L. Weatherman

Lynda L. Weatherman currently serves as President and CEO of the Economic Development Commission of Florida’s Space Coast. She is responsible for attracting new business and the retention of existing industry throughout the Space Coast. Previously, Weatherman held leadership posts with the Florida Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Economic Analysis, Gainesville Chamber of Commerce, and Marion County Economic Development Agency. In 2010, she was selected to be a member of the Air Force Chief of Staff Civic Leader Program, serving as an advisor, key communicator, and advocate for the Air Force and providing ideas and feedback to the Secretary of the Air Force and Air

Force Chief of Staff.

Lynda was appointed to the Veterans Florida Board in 2019 and Senate President Kathleen Passidomo reappointed her in 2023.

Appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives



Robert M. Kirila, Chair

Robert Kirila is the founder and Managing Director of Black Powder Partners, a private equity firm that works with the nation's top veteran executives to grow construction service companies. Previously Robert served as the CEO and Executive Director for Special Operators Transition Foundation, with a focus on providing Special Operators the support needed to find careers in the private sector. Robert was also the Chief Operating Officer for DEFENSEWERX and guided the growth of disruptive innovation practices at Air Force bases around the nation.

For 26+ years, Robert served as a Special Forces Officer in the United States Army. During that time Robert commanded Special Operations Forces on four continents in peacetime and combat and developed a unique portfolio of experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan that culminated as the senior Special Operations advisor to the Commanding General in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Robert holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of Richmond and Master's degrees from Central Michigan University and the United States Army War College. Among his awards are the Legion of Merit, Distinguished Service Medals, the Bronze Star, and the Green Beret authorized by President John F. Kennedy. Robert lives with his wife Chrissie in Valparaiso, FL.

Robert was appointed to the Veterans Florida Board of Directors in 2018, and Speaker Chris Sprowls reappointed him in 2022.



Jerry L. Neff, Treasurer

Brigadier General (Retired) Jerry L. Neff enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1960 before transferring to the Florida Army National Guard and graduating from the Florida National Guard Officer Candidate School in 1964.

When General Neff retired in June 1999, he was the Deputy Commanding General, 32nd Army Air and Missile Defense Command in Orlando.

General Neff's numerous decorations and awards include the Legion of Merit, The Meritorious Service Medal, and Army Commendation Medal (with oak leaf cluster).

General Neff was a banker for 47 years and retired in 2009 as President of M&I Bank, Florida Region. He then served for two years as the Chairman of M & I Bank Advisory Board, Florida Region.

General Neff graduated from Excelsior College with a Bachelor of Science degree in liberal arts and the U.S. Army War College. General Neff is married to the former Judy Evans and resides in Bradenton.

General Neff was appointed to the Board of Directors in 2018, and Speaker Chris Sprowls

reappointed him in 2022.



Alan J. Suskey

Alan Suskey is the managing partner at Shumaker Advisors' Tallahassee practice.

Alan previously served on Capitol Hill as the military aide to Congressman Bill Young, former Chairman of the Appropriations Committee and Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense in the United States House of Representatives. Alan's primary focus was on defense, intelligence, and homeland security projects in the Chairman's district of Pinellas County.

Prior to serving on Capitol Hill, Alan served honorably in the United States Army. During his eight years of service, he held multiple leadership posts that include leading our brave men and women during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was a member of the initial invasion force in Iraq and subsequently served in several leadership roles training various first responders throughout his career. The recipient of multiple awards for service to our country, including eight Army Commendation Medals and the Valorous Unit Award, Alan was honored as the United States Army Europe "Soldier of the Year" in 2002.

Speaker Chris Sprowls appointed Alan to the Veterans Florida Board of Directors in 2022.

Committees of the Board

The Board of Directors maintains two standing committees to advise the Board on oversight and direction to the corporation.

Budget and
Finance
Committee

Programs and
Outreach
Committee

Meet The Team



Joe Marino, Executive Director – United States Military Academy Graduate, U.S. Army Veteran

The Executive Director reports to the Board of Directors and works collaboratively with the Board to provide direction and leadership to the formulation and achievement of the organization's philosophy, mission, and its annual goals and objectives. Additionally, the Executive Director works with the Board and staff to develop and implement policies, procedures, and long-range strategic plans, and oversees administrative, financial and program operations, and all personnel matters such as the staff organizational structure, hiring, training, and performance evaluations. The Executive Director manages the implementation of Veterans Florida's programs, including Career Services, Workforce Training Grant, Entrepreneurship Program, Agriculture Program, and Department of Defense (DOD) SkillBridge internship program (Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS) Program). Joe currently serves on the CareerSource Florida Board of Directors.

Heather Collins, Director of Administration – Military in Family

The Director of Administration as part of the executive team and responsible for financial management, procurement, contract management, and human resources at Veterans Florida. The Director of Administration ensures compliance with the state of Florida as a direct funding source and any additional funding source. The Director of Administration assists with the planning of the annual Veterans Florida Expo, a career/resource fair, entrepreneur pitch competition, and workshops/discussions targeting servicemembers, veterans, and their families. Additionally, the Director of Administration supervises the organization of board meetings and other events, and assists the executive team where necessary. The Director of Administration reports to the Executive Director.

Sheila Helton, Grants Manager – Military in Family

The Grants Manager is responsible for the contract and grant administration of Veterans Florida grant programs under the VETS Program; Workforce Training Grant and Entrepreneurship Program. As part of the administration team, the Grants Manager is responsible for drafting contracts, ensuring contract compliance, collecting and reporting information to grant recipients, maintaining data, processing grant payment authorizations, compiling metrics and reporting for stakeholders and funders, and assists the executive team when necessary. The Grants Manager reports to the Director of Administration.

Consuela Hall, Office and Board Manager – Military in Family

The Office and Board Manager is responsible for general operation of the office, performing administrative duties including arranging travel, preparing travel/expense authorizations, event planning, and providing administrative and technology support. The Office and Board Manager provides administrative support to the Executive Director, Director of Administration, Board of Directors, and the Veterans Florida team in general. The Office and Board Manager reports to the Director of Administration.

Joe Follick, Communications and Marketing Director – Military in Family

The Communications and Marketing Director is part of the executive team and responsible for planning, developing, and implementing Veterans Florida's marketing strategies, overseeing communications and public relations activities, both external and internal. The Communications and Marketing Director promotes Florida's veteran-friendly reputation to servicemembers and veterans, promotes veteran-friendly employers, and continues brand awareness with elected officials, Florida employers and the general public. Additionally, the Communications and Marketing Director assists with the planning of the annual Veterans Florida Expo, a career/resource fair, entrepreneur pitch competition, and workshops/discussions targeting servicemembers, veterans, and their families. The Communications and Marketing Director reports to the Executive Director.

Elena Steinbach, Communications and Marketing Coordinator – Military in Family

The Communications and Marketing Coordinator is responsible for executing marketing strategies to various audiences which may include: generating, optimizing, and publishing content for social media and digital and print marketing. The Coordinator ensures all content adheres to the Veterans Florida branding guidelines. The Coordinator works closely with staff to promote Veterans Florida services to servicemembers, veterans, transitioning servicemembers, and Florida employers. The Communications and Marketing Coordinator reports to the Communications and Marketing Director.

Amy Entress Dudley, VETS Manager – U.S. Navy Veteran

The VETS Manager is responsible for recruiting Florida businesses interested in hiring, retaining, and training servicemembers and veterans. The VETS Manager works with targeted Florida industries to identify career opportunities for servicemembers and veterans, assisting in providing career matching of veterans with employers, or internship opportunities for active duty servicemembers or veterans. In addition, the VETS Manager manages relationships with multiple Entrepreneurship Partners, geographically diverse entities delivering the entrepreneur curriculum and resources to veterans for the Entrepreneurship Program. Amy is responsible for coordinating

and administering the Veteran Agriculture Program funded by the USDA and Skillbridge Agriculture Program. The VETS Manager assists with matching veterans to program services, resume instruction, interview preparation, career guidance and referrals to other resources. In addition, the VETS Manager attends events, such as career/resource fairs and conferences to recruit and educate Florida businesses and veterans. The VETS Manager reports to the Executive Director.

Kolby Livingston, VETS Manager – U.S. Army Veteran

The VETS Manager is responsible for recruiting Florida businesses interested in hiring, retaining, and training servicemembers and veterans. The VETS Manager works with targeted Florida industries to identify career opportunities for servicemembers and veterans, assisting in providing career matching of veterans with employers, or internship opportunities for active duty servicemembers or veterans. The VETS Manager is responsible for conducting outreach activities to encourage Florida employers to hire and train veterans through Veterans Florida Career Services, meets with employers, and initiates the application process for the Workforce Training Grant. The VETS Manager provides individual assistance to veterans and servicemembers transitioning out of the Armed Forces and living in or desiring to move to Florida. The VETS Manager assists with matching veterans to program services, resume instruction, interview preparation, career guidance and referrals to other resources. In addition, the VETS Manager attends events, such as career/resource fairs and conferences to recruit and educate Florida businesses and veterans. The VETS Manager reports to the Executive Director.

Derrick Fraser, VETS Manager – U.S. Navy Veteran

The VETS Manager is responsible for recruiting Florida businesses interested in hiring, retaining, and training servicemembers and veterans. The VETS Manager works with targeted Florida industries to identify career opportunities for servicemembers and veterans, assisting in providing career matching of veterans with employers, or internship opportunities for active duty servicemembers or veterans. The VETS Manager is responsible for conducting outreach activities to encourage Florida employers to hire and train veterans through Veterans Florida Career Services, meets with employers, and initiates the application process for the Workforce Training Grant. The VETS Manager provides individual assistance to veterans and servicemembers transitioning out of the Armed Forces and living in or desiring to move to Florida. The VETS Manager assists with matching veterans to program services, resume instruction, interview preparation, career guidance and referrals to other resources. In addition, the VETS Manager attends events, such as career/resource fairs and conferences to recruit and educate Florida businesses and veterans. The VETS Manager reports to the Executive Director.

Keith Gerena, VETS Manager - U.S. Marine

The VETS Manager is responsible for recruiting Florida businesses interested in hiring, retaining, and training servicemembers and veterans. The VETS Manager works with targeted Florida industries to identify career opportunities for servicemembers and veterans, assisting in providing career matching of veterans with employers, or internship opportunities for active duty servicemembers or veterans. The VETS Manager is responsible for conducting outreach activities to encourage Florida employers to hire and train veterans through Veterans Florida Career Services, meets with employers, and initiates the application process for the Workforce Training Grant. The VETS Manager provides individual assistance to veterans and servicemembers transitioning out of the Armed Forces and living in or desiring to move to Florida. The VETS

Manager assists with matching veterans to program services, resume instruction, interview preparation, career guidance and referrals to other resources. In addition, the VETS Manager attends events, such as career/resource fairs and conferences to recruit and educate Florida businesses and veterans. The VETS Manager reports to the Executive Director.

Philip Lewis, VETS Specialist – U.S. Navy Veteran

The VETS Specialist provides individual assistance to veterans and servicemembers transitioning out of the Armed Forces and living in or desiring to move to Florida. The VETS Specialist assists with matching veterans to program services, resume instruction, interview preparation, career guidance and referrals to other resources. In addition, the VETS Specialist attends events, such as career/resource fairs and conferences to recruit and educate veterans. The VETS Specialist reports to the Executive Director.

Ben Motes, VETS Specialist - U.S. Air Force Veteran

The VETS Coordinator provides individual assistance to veterans and servicemembers transitioning out of the Armed Forces and living in or desiring to move to Florida. The VETS Coordinator assists with matching veterans to program services, resume instruction, interview preparation, career guidance and referrals to other resources. In addition, the VETS Coordinator attends events, such as career/resource fairs and conferences to recruit and educate veterans. The VETS Coordinator reports to the Executive Director.

Josh Parker, VETS Specialist - U.S. Army Veteran

The VETS Coordinator provides individual assistance to veterans and servicemembers transitioning out of the Armed Forces and living in or desiring to move to Florida. The VETS Coordinator assists with matching veterans to program services, resume instruction, interview preparation, career guidance and referrals to other resources. In addition, the VETS Coordinator attends events, such as career/resource fairs and conferences to recruit and educate veterans. The VETS Coordinator reports to the Executive Director.

Reggie Warner, VETS Specialist - U.S. Army Veteran

The VETS Coordinator provides individual assistance to veterans and servicemembers transitioning out of the Armed Forces and living in or desiring to move to Florida. The VETS Coordinator assists with matching veterans to program services, resume instruction, interview preparation, career guidance and referrals to other resources. In addition, the VETS Coordinator attends events, such as career/resource fairs and conferences to recruit and educate veterans. The VETS Coordinator reports to the Executive Director.



Veterans Florida continues to receive recognition from the Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Services as a gold medallion award recipient. The HIRE Vets Medallion Award recognizes employers who have employed and retained veterans, including their efforts to establish employee development programs for veterans, and employers who offer veteran-specific benefits to improve retention.

Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS) Program (s. 295.22, F.S.)

Workforce and Career Services

To better serve the needs of veteran job seekers and employers, under the Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS) Program Veterans Florida provides Workforce and Career Services.



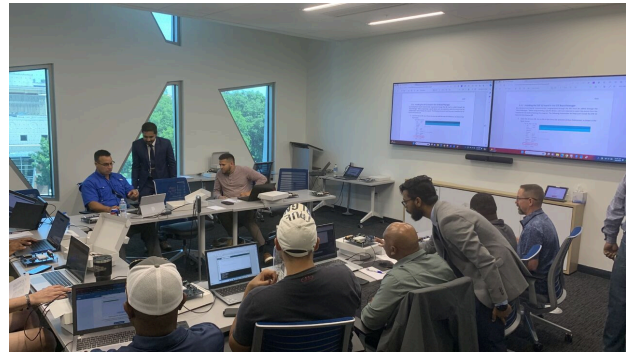
These services include the Veterans Florida Workforce Training Grant, which reimburses eligible companies in targeted industries 50 percent of the training cost for every new or existing veteran employee trained, up to \$8,000 per employee.

The Workforce Training Grant provides resources to Florida's targeted industry employers to hire, retain, and train veterans to augment their skill set developed during military service. The goal is to give veterans technical skills that are marketable, usable and transferable. The VETS Team actively works with employers to translate military experience into comparable civilian experience requirements. The team educates employers and their human resources teams on the value and capabilities veterans bring to the workforce.

The Career Services Program allows Veterans Florida to actively recruit qualified veterans to fill positions at a network of Florida employers. Veterans can register at veteransflorida.org for assistance. The VETS team reaches out to every veteran who contacts Veterans Florida to provide employment services such as resume assistance, interview preparation, career matching, and counsel veterans on additional resources available to them. The VETS Team annually attend at least twenty-five career and resource fairs in-state and out of state, three in-state airshows, and several on-base activities sharing opportunities with veterans and servicemembers.

During FY 2023-2024, a total of 3,112 veterans in Florida and from across the nation were served seeking career assistance or job placement in Florida. The top five states included veterans from Florida, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia and Texas seeking services. More than 120 employers used Veterans Florida Workforce or Career Services this year.

For FY 2023-24, Veterans Florida received over 300 applications as a result of a partnership with the University of Florida in the VETS-HASTE Program (Veterans Hardware Security Training and Education), which will provide industry-driven courses and hands-on learning to ten Florida veterans. The training started in May 2024 and will conclude in November 2024. Selected veteran participants will receive a \$10,000 stipend and \$2,500 for travel from the University. This partnership is a three-year endeavor and will result in 30 veterans trained and ready for careers in hardware security.



Workforce Grant Reimbursements FY 2016-24		
Fiscal Year	Trained	Reimbursements
FY 2015-16	1	\$2,520
FY 2016-17	117	\$476,070
FY 2017-18	187	\$687,483
FY 2018-19	303	\$712,765
FY 2019-20	393	\$1,112,985
FY 2020-21	237	\$862,129
FY 2021-22	118	\$406,269
FY 2022-23	197	\$918,750
FY 2023-24	239	\$688,479
Total	1,792	\$5,847,450

Florida SkillBridge Initiative

The DOD SkillBridge program provides transitioning servicemembers, with commander approval during their last six months of military service, the opportunity to work for a civilian employer to sharpen critical industry skills and obtain specialized training. The program is designed to reduce the employment gap for veterans between their military separation and civilian life. Servicemembers participating in SkillBridge can maintain their military compensation and benefits. This arrangement benefits employers by providing access to a highly skilled workforce without incurring full training costs. Florida's SkillBridge initiative provides a job pipeline for transitioning servicemembers, which encourages them to relocate to the state and establish permanent residency.

SkillBridge Program FY 2024-24	
Fiscal Year	Trained
FY 2020-21	1
FY 2021-22	35
FY 2022-23	96
FY 2023-24	88
Total	220

In 2020, Veterans Florida became an authorized DOD SkillBridge provider with our Agriculture Program in partnership with the University of Florida. In 2021, Veterans Florida became the first statewide organization to become an authorized SkillBridge provider and the Legislature designated Veterans Florida as the state's principal organization for the SkillBridge initiative. Veterans Florida continues to expand the program working with more than 100 employers, private businesses and state government agencies to offer SkillBridge. This past year 88 servicemembers completed SkillBridge training.

Entrepreneurship Program

Florida has the third-largest number of veteran-owned businesses generating \$57.7 billion in sales. Veterans are self-employed at a higher rate than civilians. The Veterans Florida Entrepreneurship Program offers veterans training, facilitation, and mentorship designed to meet the veteran where they are in their entrepreneurial journey.

The Entrepreneurship Program conducted its ninth year of operation in Fiscal Year 2023-24. Since the inception of the program in early 2016, the program has received more than 7,900 applications from veterans across the state and served 6,343 veterans.



The program features several opportunities to meet the needs of veteran entrepreneurs. This approach favors tailored training over information overload. Veterans can participate in cohort-based training, workshops, networking, and/or coworking.

Cohort-based training provides multiple training modules to a small group of prescreened participants in a facilitated discussion environment over the course of several weeks. Cohorts are designed to help veteran entrepreneurs with starting their business, or growing their business after startup. These cohorts delve deeply

into all aspects of entrepreneurship and are hosted by one of our entrepreneur partners. Cohort attendance is reserved for a maximum of 15 veterans. Acceptance into this portion of the program is managed by the partners.

Workshops provide veteran entrepreneurs with topical general business training to groups of participants of any size over the course of a few hours. Training in general business topics such as legal structures, stakeholders, launching, marketing, franchising, acquisitions, and other issues that business owners frequently face. Workshops are open to all interested veteran entrepreneurs and are hosted by our entrepreneur partners.

Networking events provide veteran entrepreneurs opportunities to network and connect with peers and resources. Networking offers entrepreneurs personal growth, developing professional connections and building a sense of community. Networking events are conducted by our entrepreneur partners and provide veterans interested in entrepreneurship the ability to learn about program opportunities, network with peers, and connect with resources to assist them on their entrepreneurial journey. Networking events are open to all interested veterans, mentors, entrepreneurs, and community business leaders.

Coworking space provides veteran entrepreneurs with shared office space and access to local resources. Partners offering coworking space may provide unlimited or near unlimited 24/7 access to office space, desk (private preferred), member-only events and workshops, conference room

access, discounted venue rental, mailing and business address, access to mentorship from local business leaders and professional consultants, and Lean Startup programming.

Entrepreneurship Program Partners FY 2023-24		
 <p>Tampa</p>	 <p>Fort Lauderdale</p>	 <p>Destin and Fort Walton Beach</p>
 <p>Jacksonville, Orlando, Panhandle, Space Coast and Tampa</p>	 <p>Boca Raton</p>	 <p>Fort Myers</p>
 <p>Miami and Panhandle</p>	 <p>Bonita Springs</p>	 <p>St. Petersburg</p>
 <p>Jacksonville</p>	 <p>Orlando</p>	 <p>Lakeland</p>
 <p>Tallahassee</p>	 <p>Orlando</p>	 <p>Melbourne</p>

Entrepreneurship Program Partners FY 2023-24

STATION HOUSE	wework	
St. Petersburg	Miami and Tampa	

Entrepreneur Program Participants					
Fiscal Year	Served*	Cohort Trained	Fiscal Year	Served*	Cohort Trained
FY 2015-16	424	167	FY 2020-21	525	262
FY 2016-17	300	147	FY 2021-22	989	132
FY 2017-18	393	82	FY 2022-23	1,614	173
FY 2018-19	426	96	FY 2023-24	1,368	244
FY 2019-20	304	108			
			Total	6,343	1,411

* Served includes veteran participation in any program element offered in the Entrepreneurship Program including workshops and networking.

Marketing Program

The Veterans Florida marketing and communications campaign supports the organization's primary goals - Career Assistance, SkillBridge placements, Entrepreneurship Training - and promotes Florida's status as the nation's top state for veterans, transitioning servicemembers, and their families. The target audience is servicemembers, veterans and spouses in the 24 months leading up to separation from the military and 36 months following separation. The marketing team produces all content and executes all advertising for the Veterans Florida Expo each year in coordination with the team.

The marketing team works closely with VISIT FLORIDA to carry out an annual marketing campaign. The marketing focus is social advertising on Florida's natural beauty. VISIT follows up by directing veterans and servicemembers to our website. The success of that strategy is reflected in engagement and audience size, and significant growth in targeted industries and demographics. Along with LinkedIn, email campaigns are primary drivers of inbound leads. Audiences in social media platforms - LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter/X and Instagram - showed growth this fiscal year.

The marketing team produces content highlighting servicemember and veteran success and opportunities in targeted Florida industries. Articles and posts are among the highest-performing content pieces, and have contributed to earned media coverage in major target markets. The marketing team promotes sponsored events, resulting in engagement with veterans, servicemembers, employers, and economic development partners to promote opportunities, answer questions, and increase visibility of Florida's veterans support initiatives.

In 2023, Veterans Florida partnered with Legendary LTD of Tarpon Springs, FL to design and produce t-shirts for marketing/promotional use during the year. Later we partnered with them to produce and sell shirts to support our mission and activities with "Living the Dream" and "Land of the Free"; 50% of the proceeds are donated to Veterans Florida.

The 2024 Veterans Florida Expo was held June 7 and 8 at the Hilton Tampa Airport Westshore. The two-day event connects servicemembers, veterans and their families with SkillBridge, career and entrepreneurship opportunities and resources in Florida. Attendees can network with other veterans, hear success stories, meet with veteran friendly employers, and watch Florida's top veteran entrepreneurs in the Battle of the Pitches competition. Expo featured over 40 employers and exhibitors, 25 speakers, 12 pitch competitors in the Battle of the Pitches, and



over 170 attendees. Expo sponsors included Boeing, CareerSource Florida, Blue Waters Development Group, and the Tampa Bay Rays.

The Expo pitch competitors were Entrepreneur Program participants that completed a partner cohort during fiscal year 2023-24. Veterans Florida awarded \$17,500 to the following veteran-owned business: Vig Solutions awarded \$10,000; Broken Veteran 3D Designs awarded \$5,000; and Priority Objective Consulting awarded \$2,500. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive from attendees, sponsors, and exhibitors.

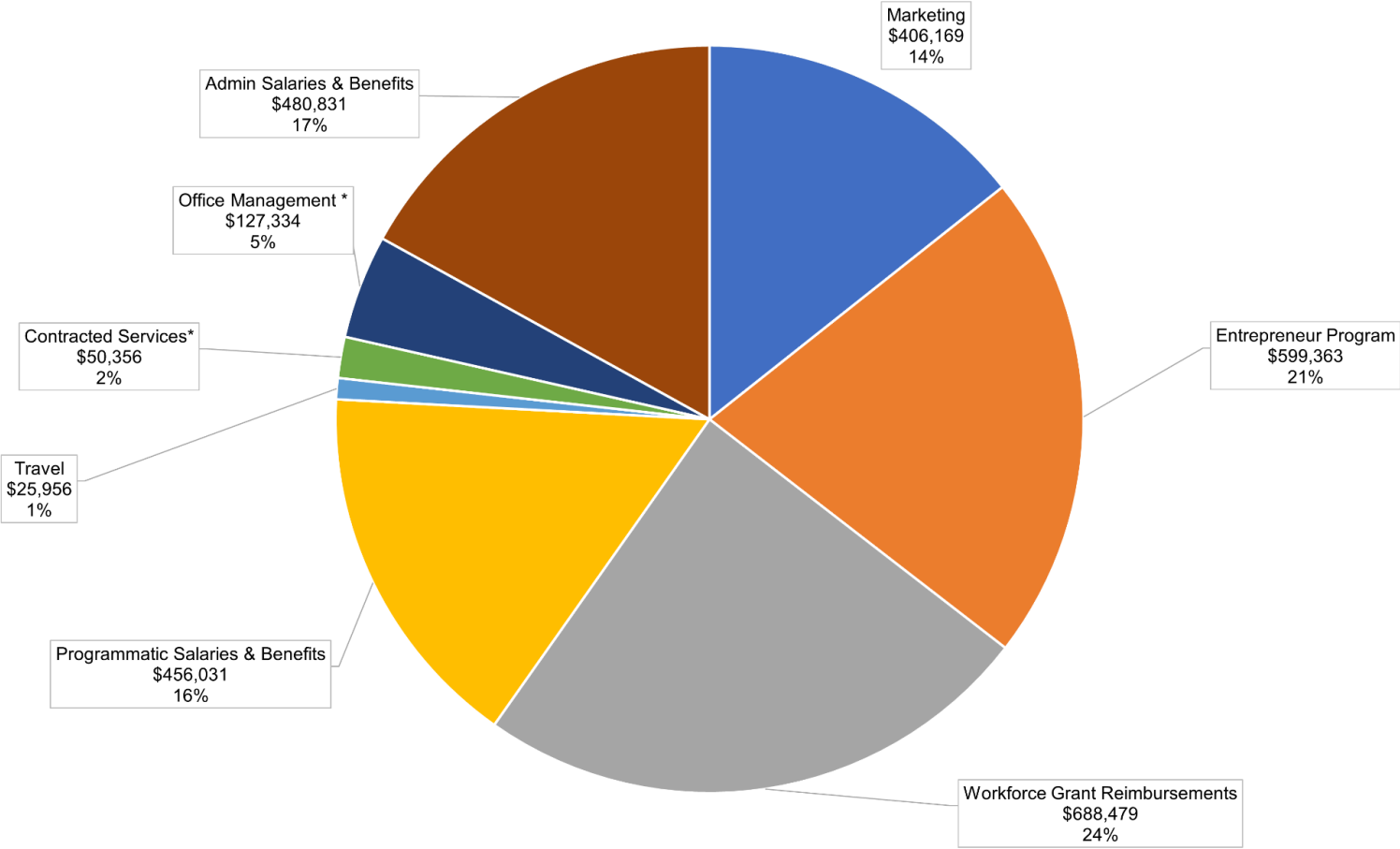


Marketing Metrics				
	FY 22-23	FY 23-24	% Change	Notes
Total Facebook Page Likes	78,394	78,809	+0.52	
Email Newsletter Subscribers	26,750	24,577	-8.2	Scrubbed Inactive Users
LinkedIn Followers	8,148	9,068	+11.3	
Twitter Followers	844	929	+10.1	
Instagram Followers	1,457	1,523	+4.5	

Financial Summary

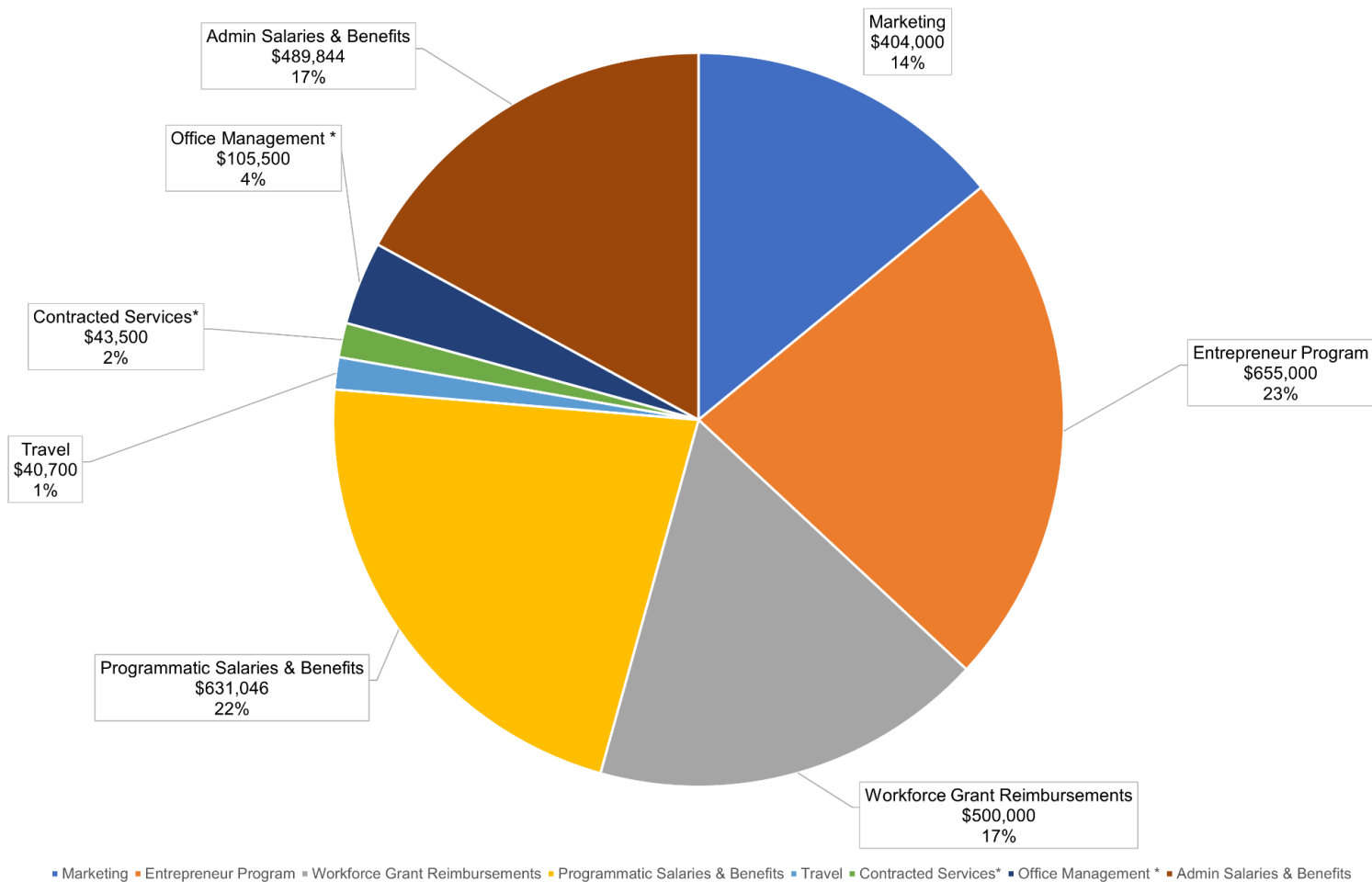
Veterans Florida derives revenue from many sources, with the primary funder being the State of Florida.

FY 2023-24 Expenses



■ Marketing ■ Entrepreneur Program ■ Workforce Grant Reimbursements ■ Programmatic Salaries & Benefits ■ Travel ■ Contracted Services* ■ Office Management* ■ Admin Salaries & Benefits

FY 2024-25 Budget



*Programmatic Salaries & Benefits includes salaries and benefits of employees providing direct services to servicemembers, veterans and their families. Office Management includes operational expenses such as office supplies and equipment, lease of office space, software, phone and internet services, dues/subscriptions, postage/shipping, office maintenance, and printing. Contracted Services such as business insurance, accounting, auditing services, HR/Payroll, legal services, IT support, and bank services support the organization's internal operations.

Contracts FY 2022-2023

The corporation entered into the following contracts to carry out its duties.

Contracts				
Date Entered	Contractor	Service Provided	Amount	Date Completed
July 12, 2021	930 TVR, LLC	Office Lease	\$184,372	Aug 31, 2024
Oct 7, 2022	Diversity Group & Associates	Agriculture Program Quarterly Audits	\$18,695	Oct 31, 2023
June 26, 2023	Hilton Tampa Airport Westshore	Expo Venue	\$20,000	June 8, 2024
July 27, 2023	RecruitMilitary	Marketing and Career Fair Participation	\$25,995	June 30, 2023
July 31, 2023	Journal Communications	Winter 2023-24 Florida Farm & Family Insertion	\$1,690	Dec 31, 2023
Aug 14, 2023	Doubletree by Hilton Tallahassee	November 2023 Board Meeting Venue	\$750	Nov 14, 2023
Aug 25, 2023	Morale, Welfare and Recreation Fund at NAS Pensacola	2023 NAS Pensacola Blue Angels Homecoming Air Show Sponsor	\$25,000	Nov 4, 2023
Sept 11, 2023	Efrain Torres	Freelance Writer	\$500	Oct 9, 2024

Contracts				
Sept 18, 2023	City of Jacksonville	2023 Sea and Sky Air Show Sponsorship	\$25,000	Oct 22, 2023
Oct 3, 2023	DocuSign	eSignature Software	\$4,131	June 30, 2024
Oct 10, 2023	PCB Entertainment, LLC	2024 Gulf Coast Jam Sponsorship	\$100,000	June 2, 2024
Oct 18, 2023	Strategic Digital Services, LLC	Logo Redesign	\$750	Oct 25, 2023
Nov 2, 2023	Morale, Welfare and Recreation Fund at MacDill AFB	2024 MacDill Tampa Bay AirFest Sponsor	\$15,000	Mar 30, 2024
March 11, 2024	Florida Veterans Foundation	Florida Veterans Benefits Guide Advertising	\$5,000	Dec 31, 2024
April 26, 2024	Silver Productions	Expo Video Production	\$5,750	June 30, 2024
May 8, 2024	BowStern Marketing Communications	Website Redesign and Development	\$18,550	Oct 1, 2024
June 19, 2024	Carr, Riggs & Ingram	Auditing & Form 990 Tax Preparation	\$13,610	Dec 31, 2024
June 27, 2024	Central Groves Corporation	Office Lease	\$307,420	Aug 31, 2029

Development

The Veterans Florida team works diligently to raise additional public and private funds to augment State of Florida funded programs. Sponsors may choose to target funds specifically to the VETS program, events such as our annual Expo, or for general operations to support the Veterans Florida mission. Our successful development efforts are a direct result of our proactive approach to forging relationships with donors, keeping them engaged, and providing measurable insights into the impact of their support. Given the overwhelmingly positive feedback from existing and potential sponsors and upward trends, we are confident the future will yield even greater outcomes for veterans returning to civilian life and for our economic impact within the state of Florida.

Awards/Sponsorships			
Organization	Amount	Type	Purpose
USDA - AGVETS Program (Program Ended Aug 31, 2023)	\$31,375	Grant	Agriculture Program
Boeing	\$40,000	Grant	VETS Program
Boeing	\$10,000	Sponsorship	Expo Sponsor
Career Source Florida	\$10,000	Sponsorship	Expo Sponsor
Blue Water Development Group	\$4,000	Sponsorship	Expo Sponsor
Tampa Bay Rays	\$3,000	Sponsorship	Expo Sponsor
Learning Alliance	\$1,050	Exhibitor	Expo Exhibitor
Schiller International University	\$1,050	Exhibitor	Expo Exhibitor
Palm Beach Sheriff Office	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
CAP Government	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
Citrus County Sheriff's Office	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
Etairos Health	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
Florida International University	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
Home Builders Institute	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
Integrated Power Services	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer

Awards/Sponsorships			
Launch Credit Union	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
Marion County Sheriff's Office	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
MasTec Inc	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
Navy Recruiting Reserve Command	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
Orange County Sheriff's Office	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
Pasco Sheriff Office	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
RoadSafe Traffic Systems	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
Synergy Equipment	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer
Woodmen Life	\$400	Donation	General Mission
Other Supporters	\$370	Donation	General Mission
Legendary LTD	\$368	Shirt Sales	General Mission
Total FY 2023-24	\$109,163		

Outlook

As Veterans Florida nears its tenth anniversary of helping veterans transition to civilian careers, Gov. Ron DeSantis signed House Bill 1329 into law in June 2024, providing a refined and enhanced scope of work for the next ten years and beyond. House Bill 1329:

- Designates Veterans Florida as the initial point of military transition assistance for veterans and their spouses, connecting them with state benefits and resources, career placement, and entrepreneur training.
- Specifies the target market for Veterans Florida as servicemembers and their spouses with 24 months or less prior to their discharge and for up to 36 months after discharge.
- Prioritizes highly skilled employment opportunities as defined by the state’s targeted industries list.
- Focuses the scope of the Veterans Employment and Training Services Program to provide support for veterans seeking certifications or licenses in high-demand fields.

The clarity and focus of this new law elevates the role of Veterans Florida as a key part of the state’s economic development.

The legislation also created two new ex-officio positions on the Board; a member of the Florida House of Representatives and a member of the Florida Senate appointed by the House Speaker and Senate President respectively. Sen. Jay Collins and Rep. Danny Alvarez, each a veteran, were appointed to the new spots.

The Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs will procure a third-party vendor to develop and implement an occupational license reciprocity system (Specific Appropriation 607, Chapter 2024-231, Laws of Florida) for veterans and spouses moving to Florida with professional licenses. The selected vendor will coordinate work efforts with Veterans Florida and the portal will be housed on the Veterans Florida website.

In September 2024, Veterans Florida was awarded \$772,349 as a prime award from the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences for the Agriculture Program for 2024-27. The Agriculture Program is a unique six-month training designed specifically for veterans and servicemembers seeking to establish or advance their careers in Florida’s thriving agriculture sector. Over the course of the three-year program, Veterans Florida will work with the University of Florida to provide agriculture training to 30 veterans. Veterans will receive a comprehensive, hands-on learning experience that equips veterans and servicemembers with the essential knowledge and skills needed to excel in various roles within the industry. Veterans enrolled in the program will receive a stipend, the average stipend is \$16,800 per veteran.

To better serve veterans, servicemembers, spouses and businesses, Veterans Florida began a redesign of the website to improve and streamline access to Veterans Florida services, and better highlight the qualities and benefits that attract families and businesses to the state.

The first cohort training of the VETS-HASTE program concluded in November 2024. Veterans Florida and the University of Florida will begin accepting applications for the next cohort in early 2025 with classes to begin in late spring. This will be the second year of this three-year program. Each of the ten veterans per cohort currently living in Florida receives a \$10,000 stipend, \$2,500 for travel and lodging, a week of hands-on training at the UF campus in Gainesville, virtual instruction, and the opportunity for internships with businesses in this sector.

The 2025 Expo will be June 6-7 at the Hilton Tampa Airport Westshore to allow more veterans to experience the State of Florida's official economic opportunity event for the military community.

Equipped and guided by our strategic plan and our enhanced scope of work contained in House Bill 1329, Veterans Florida aims to build on the successes from 2024-25 state funding and explore additional private funding partners that support our programs and services.

The unwavering support from the State of Florida, those who served, statewide partners, and industry leaders push us each day to connect those who served with our powerful career and entrepreneurship tools, training, and resources that make Florida the nation's most veteran-friendly state.



VETERANS
FLORIDA