



Your Pursuit • Our Power

# Annual Report 2019



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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.

November 15, 2019

It is my distinct privilege to submit Veterans Florida's annual report for 2019. This report marks the fourth full year of operation for our organization that we have made great progress in all of our major veterans program areas. Our mission is to attract and retain veterans to our great state and to make Florida their permanent residence.

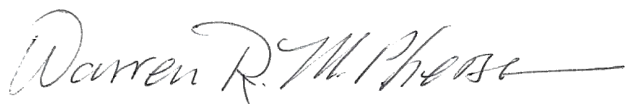
Our nationwide, veteran-focused marketing campaign brought more than 266,000 unique and repeat visitors to our website and provided them with information on the benefits and opportunities available to veterans in and interested in Florida. This year's campaign saw continued growth in social media followers and email newsletter subscribers, as well as attracting over 1,000 job seekers to submit resumes.

The Veterans Florida Workforce Training Grant program has seen steady growth and to date we have contracted with over 40 total businesses that have hired more than 350 veterans. These veterans collectively have earned over \$11.5 million in salary that is going directly back into Florida's economy.

Since the inception of the Veterans Florida Entrepreneurship Program in early 2016, it has received more than 2,400 applications from veterans across the state, served 1,543 veterans and had 154 businesses started by the veterans who have graduated from the program. These businesses have collectively earned almost \$26 million in revenue, accessed over \$3.2 million in debt and equity financing, and hired 209 employees.

The Board of Directors and staff of Veterans Florida take pride in accomplishing this important mission in a transparent and cost-effective manner, always remembering that we have been entrusted with the taxpayer's dollars. I'm proud of what we have accomplished so far and very excited for the future of this program to serve and attract veterans to make Florida their home.

Sincerely,



Warren R. McPherson

Chair, Veterans Florida Board of Directors

CC: Danny Burgess, Executive Director, Florida Department of Veterans Affairs

## Board of Directors

### Appointed by the Governor



**Warren R. "Rocky" McPherson, Chair**

Rocky McPherson is recently retired from 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. He had previously served five years as the Executive Director, Florida Department of Veterans Affairs. He 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 as a carrier based Naval Aviator flying the A6E. During his Marine career he held key leadership roles 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.

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

Governor Rick Scott appointed Rocky to the Veterans Florida Board of Directors in 2017.



**James Sampey**

After serving 23 years at Cox Target Media, including roles as President of Valpak and Executive Vice President at Cox Target Media, Jim Sampey founded CIHU (Can I Help You?), LLC, in retirement, helping friends and business associates take their businesses to the next level. Jim is engaged as Founder, Advisor and/or Investor to several organizations including Live Water Sports, Sky Data Ventures, Sterling Payment Technologies, Valpak, Shinn and Company, savvycard.com, Prime Medical Apparel, and Performance

Health Applied Technologies. He also serves on various Boards, including the Tampa Bay Partnership, University of Dayton, SunTrust Bank, Now Up Foundation, Vision Integrated Graphics, and the Tampa Bay Defense Alliance.

Governor Rick Scott appointed Jim to the Veterans Florida Board of Directors in 2014.



**Mark Harden**

Mark Harden served in the U.S. Navy for thirty years and retired as a Chief of Naval Operations Directed Master Chief. He currently works as Director of the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society in Pensacola, FL. His passion is working on programs that support Veterans and Active Duty military personnel.

Actively engaged in the community in various capacities, Mark is the current Area President Gulf Coast for the Navy League of the United States and is the organization's National Director. He co-founded the Pensacola Veteran Support Organization Network which is a clearinghouse of over 40 veteran support organizations that work together to solve local veteran and military needs. He is also a board member of the Community Veterans Engagement Board for Northwest Florida. Mark is a graduate and an active member of the Leadership Pensacola Alumni Association where he has held a variety of leadership posts.

Governor Rick Scott appointed Mark to the Veterans Florida Board of Directors in 2017.

**Appointed by the Senate President**



**Tom Rice, Treasurer**

Tom Rice is the owner of The Magnolia Grill of Ft. Walton Beach, which he and his wife, Peggy, opened in 1996. In 2004, the Magnolia Grill received Florida's Good Neighbor Award from the National Restaurant Association and was the Greater Ft. Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce's Small Business of the Year. In 2007, Congressman Jeff Miller recognized Tom and Peggy for humanitarian work in the Congressional Record of the 110th Congress. Tom serves on numerous Boards, including being Chairman of the Community Advisory Board of the Salvation Army of Okaloosa and Walton County, Florida. He serves as

Secretary of Catholic Charities of Northwest Florida and Chairs the Veterans Tribute Tower Committee. He was named to the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame, Class of 2017 . He is a Life Member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Disabled American Veterans 72.

Tom is a veteran and retired as First Sgt. from the U.S. Army. Former Senate President Don Gaetz appointed him to the Veterans Florida Board of Directors in 2014 and Senate President Bill Galvano re-appointed him in 2019.



**Angela Drzewiecki**

Angela Drzewiecki is a consultant at Peebles, Smith & Matthews, a well-regarded government affairs firm in Tallahassee, Florida. Prior to joining Peebles, Smith & Matthews, she worked as a legislative consultant at Southern Strategy Group, where she cultivated a deep understanding of clients' interests in active legislation and reinforced their positions on issues.

As a Gold Star family member and military spouse, Angela brings a unique perspective and valuable insight to the Veterans Florida Board. Senate President Bill Galvano appointed Angela to the Veterans Florida Board in 2019.



**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 businesses and the retention of existing industry throughout the Space Coast. Previously, Weatherman has 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.

Senate President Bill Galvano appointed Lynda to the Veterans Florida Board in 2019.



Appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives



Martin Steele, Vice Chair

Lieutenant General Martin R. Steele enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1965 and rose from private to three-star general, culminating his military career as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, Policies, and Operations at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, in Washington, DC in 1999. A decorated combat veteran, he is a recognized expert in the integration of all elements of national power (diplomatic, economic, informational, and military) with strategic military war plans and has served as an executive strategic planner/policy director in multiple theaters across Asia. His extraordinary career was chronicled as one of three principles in the award-winning military biography *Boys of '67* by Charles Jones.

Upon retiring from active duty in 1999, General Steele was the Chairman and CEO of Steele Partners, Inc., a strategic advisory and leadership consulting company and holds leadership positions in a number of non-profit organizations aimed at assisting transitioning veterans.

Speaker Will Weatherford appointed General Steele to the Board of Directors in 2014.



Robert M. Kirila

Robert Kirila currently serves as the Executive Director for Your Grateful Nation, with a focus on providing Special Operators the support needed to find careers in the private sector. Previously, Robert was the Chief Operating Officer for DEFENSEWERX and guided the growth of disruptive innovation practices at Air Force bases around the nation.

Serving as a Senior Leader in the last seven years of his 26 year career in the U.S. Army, Rob developed a unique portfolio of experience including stints leading Special Operators in Iraq and Afghanistan and advising the Commanding General in the fight against ISIS.

Robert holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of Richmond and Master's degrees from Central Michigan University and the United States 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 and two children in Valparaiso.

Speaker Richard Corcoran appointed Robert to the Veterans Florida Board of Directors in 2018.



Jerry L. Neff

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

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

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, and then served for two years as Chairman of M & I Bank Advisory Board.

General Neff graduated from Excelsior College with a Bachelor of Science degree in liberal arts and is married to the former Judy Evans. They reside in Bradenton, Florida.

Speaker Richard Corcoran appointed General Neff to the Board of Directors in 2018.

Committees of the Board

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

Internal Operations Committee

External Relations 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, he 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 design of staff organizational structure, hiring, performance evaluations.

**Vacant, Career Services Director** –

The Career Services Director is part of the executive team and responsible for all employment assistance efforts of Veterans Florida. This position is responsible for overall implementation and execution of the Workforce Training Grant program, recruiting efforts to match veterans with employment and outreach efforts to businesses throughout Florida. The Career Services Director implements and maintains technology solutions that support the Workforce Training Grant program and manages a team of veteran and employer outreach specialists.

**Jeremy Sinnemaki, Entrepreneurship Director** – U.S. Air Force Retired

The Entrepreneurship Director is part of the executive team and responsible for coordinating, maintaining, and monitoring the organization's veteran entrepreneurship program, which includes multiple, geographically diverse Florida network partners delivering the curriculum to veterans. The Entrepreneurship Director manages the network partner contracts and maintains a statewide list of all veteran specific entrepreneurship resources.

**Stephanie Massengale, Director of Administration** – Mother of U.S. Navy Veteran

The Director of Administration is part of the executive team and responsible for developing, maintaining, and monitoring the organization's budgets and budgetary process. The Director of Administration operates and supervises the organization's primary grant program. Additionally, the Director of Administration organizes Board Meetings and other events, and assists the executive team where necessary.

**Dan Barrow, Communications Director** – Military Supporter

The Communications Director is part of the executive team and responsible for developing, maintaining, and monitoring the organization's marketing and public relations activities.

Additionally, the Communications Director organizes the Veterans Florida Expo and other events, and assists the executive team where necessary.

**Andrea Hornsby, Office and Board Manager** – U.S. Navy Veteran

The Office and Board Manager provides duties as directed by the Executive Director to include calendars, meeting schedules, travel arrangements, processing expense reports, production of reports, arranging monthly meetings, teleconferences, webinars and taking minutes, prepares correspondence on behalf of the Executive Director, transcribes meeting minutes, and performs general administrative office support functions.

**Amy Entress, Agriculture Program Manager** – U.S. Navy Veteran

The Agriculture Program Manager is responsible for coordinating and administering the organization's veteran agriculture program. The Agriculture Program Manager assists the Entrepreneurship Director in managing the internships and contracts with the research center partners and prepares and maintains regular reports from the partners.

**Allison Rudd, Entrepreneurship Program Coordinator** – Military Supporter

The Entrepreneurship Program Coordinator is responsible for coordinating and administering the organization's veteran entrepreneurship program. The Entrepreneurship Program Coordinator assists the Entrepreneurship Director in managing the contracts with the network partners and prepares and maintains regular reports from the partners.

**Christopher Meinhardt, Employer Outreach Specialist** – U.S. Marine Corps veteran

The Employer Outreach Specialist conducts outreach activities to encourage Florida employers to hire and train veterans through Veterans Florida Career Services, attends business functions, meets with employers, and initiates the application process for the Workforce Training Grant. The Employer Outreach Specialist reports to the Career Services Director.

**Fernando Mendez, Veteran and Employer Outreach Specialist** – U.S. Navy veteran

The Veteran and Employer Outreach Specialist provides individual assistance to veterans living in or desiring to move to Florida through Veterans Florida Career Services, sets appointments and works with veterans seeking employment through our case management system, conducts outreach activities to encourage Florida employers to hire and train veterans through Veterans Florida Career Services, attends business functions, meets with employers, and initiates the application process for the Workforce Training Grant. The Veteran and Employer Outreach Specialist reports to the Career Services Director.

**Justin Varnes, Veteran Employment Specialist** – U.S. Army veteran

The Veteran Employment Specialist provides individual assistance to veterans living in or desiring to move to Florida through Veterans Florida Career Services, sets appointments and works with veterans seeking employment through our case management system, and reports to the Career Services Director.

**Kolby Livingston, Veteran Employment Specialist** – U.S. Army veteran

The Veteran Employment Specialist provides individual assistance to veterans living in or desiring to move to Florida through Veterans Florida Career Services, sets appointments and works with veterans seeking employment through our case management system, and reports to the Career Services Director.

**Danielle Ochoa, Web Developer** – Military in Family

The Web Developer responsible for planning, implementing, and maintaining Veterans Florida’s online web presence, automated workflows, and reports to the Communications Director.

**Sarah Harmon, Social Media Specialist** – Military Supporter

The Social Media Specialist ensures all content respects the organization’s brand voice and style guidelines by working closely with the Program staff to promote Veterans Florida services to veterans, transitioning service members, and Florida employers, and reports to the Communications Director.

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

## Workforce and Career Services Program

To better serve the needs of veteran job seekers and employers, Veterans Florida maintains the Workforce and Career Services Program. This program houses our largest grant program, the Veterans Florida Workforce Training Grant, which reimburses eligible companies for 50 percent of the training cost for every veteran trained, up to \$8,000 per employee.

The Career Services Program allows Veterans Florida to actively recruit qualified veterans to fill approved positions at companies across the state. Veterans can upload their resume for consideration for any position or apply directly for open positions through the career portal on veteransflorida.org.



Veterans Florida has received more than 2,500 resumes from veterans seeking employment in Florida and is actively matching them with job openings at our training grant employers. Over 40 employers have used Veterans Florida Career Services.

	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	Total
Veterans Trained	1	117	187	303	608
Workforce Grant Reimbursements	\$2,520	\$476,070	\$687,483	\$712,765	\$1,878,837
Total Grant Reimbursements (as of September 30, 2019)					\$2,078,089

Workforce Veteran Training Grant Program began January 2016

## Entrepreneurship Program



Nearly one in four active duty service members and veterans want to open and operate their own business. Opportunity, freedom, and challenge attract them to business ownership. The Veterans Florida Entrepreneurship Program offers veterans online and



on-site instruction, facilitation, and mentorship designed to match up with their level of knowledge and their busy schedule.

The Entrepreneurship Program conducted its fourth year of operation in Fiscal Year 2018-19. Since the inception of the program in early 2016, the program has received more than 2,400 applications from veterans across the state and served 1,543 veterans.

The program features three pathways to meet the needs of veteran entrepreneurs at different stages of their entrepreneurial journey.

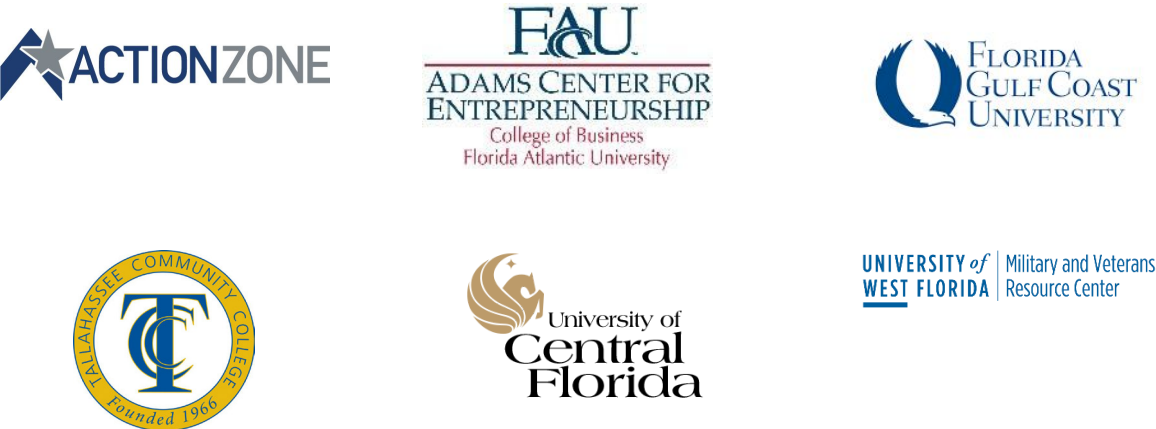
The first pathway, Discover, comprises online lessons which familiarize veterans with basic terminology and concepts and acts as a gateway to the second and third pathways. Veterans Florida licensed an existing web-based system to give our participants a low-risk, low-commitment option to start learning the foundations of entrepreneurship.

The second pathway, Explore, offers topical workshops held on location at our six network partners. This pathway comprises a minimum of six, 2-3 hour workshops and is designed for veterans with early-stage ideas or early-stage companies.

The third pathway, Master, is an advanced program that delves more deeply into all aspects of entrepreneurship, and comprises 60 hours of on location facilitation held at one of our six network partners. This pathway is reserved for a maximum of 20 veterans with well-defined business ideas or early-stage companies at each network partner. Acceptance into this portion of the program is managed by the partners.



**Entrepreneurship Program Network Partners for 2018-19**



Entrepreneur Program Participants			
Fiscal Year	Applications Received	Participants Served	Program Completions
FY15-16	612	424	167
FY16-17	458	300	147
FY17-18	787	393	82
FY18-19	910	426	96

Entrepreneur Program Participants Reported Data			
Revenue Generated	Capital Invested	Businesses	Hires
\$25,595,907	\$3,244,497	152	209

**Agriculture Program**

Agriculture is one of Florida’s largest economic sectors generating nearly \$120 billion in economic impact and supporting nearly 2 million jobs. The Veteran Florida Agriculture Program is a nine-month internship pilot program to help veterans transition into sustainable careers in Florida’s vibrant agriculture industry. The internship provides veterans a comprehensive learning experience that gives them the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be competitive for today’s leading agriculture careers.



Veterans Florida was awarded a subcontract to a United States Department of Agriculture’s grant in FY 2017-18 and administered the Agriculture program in 2018-19. Veterans Florida recruits veteran interns to fill University of Florida Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences positions located at Research and Education Centers throughout the state. Selected interns receive a monthly stipend for the duration of the internship in addition to an hourly wage. After completion of the internship, Veterans Florida assists participants with job placement and/or obtaining entrepreneurship resources in the agribusiness industry.



Fiscal Year	Applications Received	Participants Served	Program Graduates
FY18-19	85	8	3

### Marketing Program

The Veterans Florida marketing and communications campaign supports the organization’s primary goals: Career Training, Entrepreneurship Training, and promoting Florida’s status as the nation’s most veteran-friendly state. The target audience is service members and veterans in the 12 months leading up to and following separation from the military.

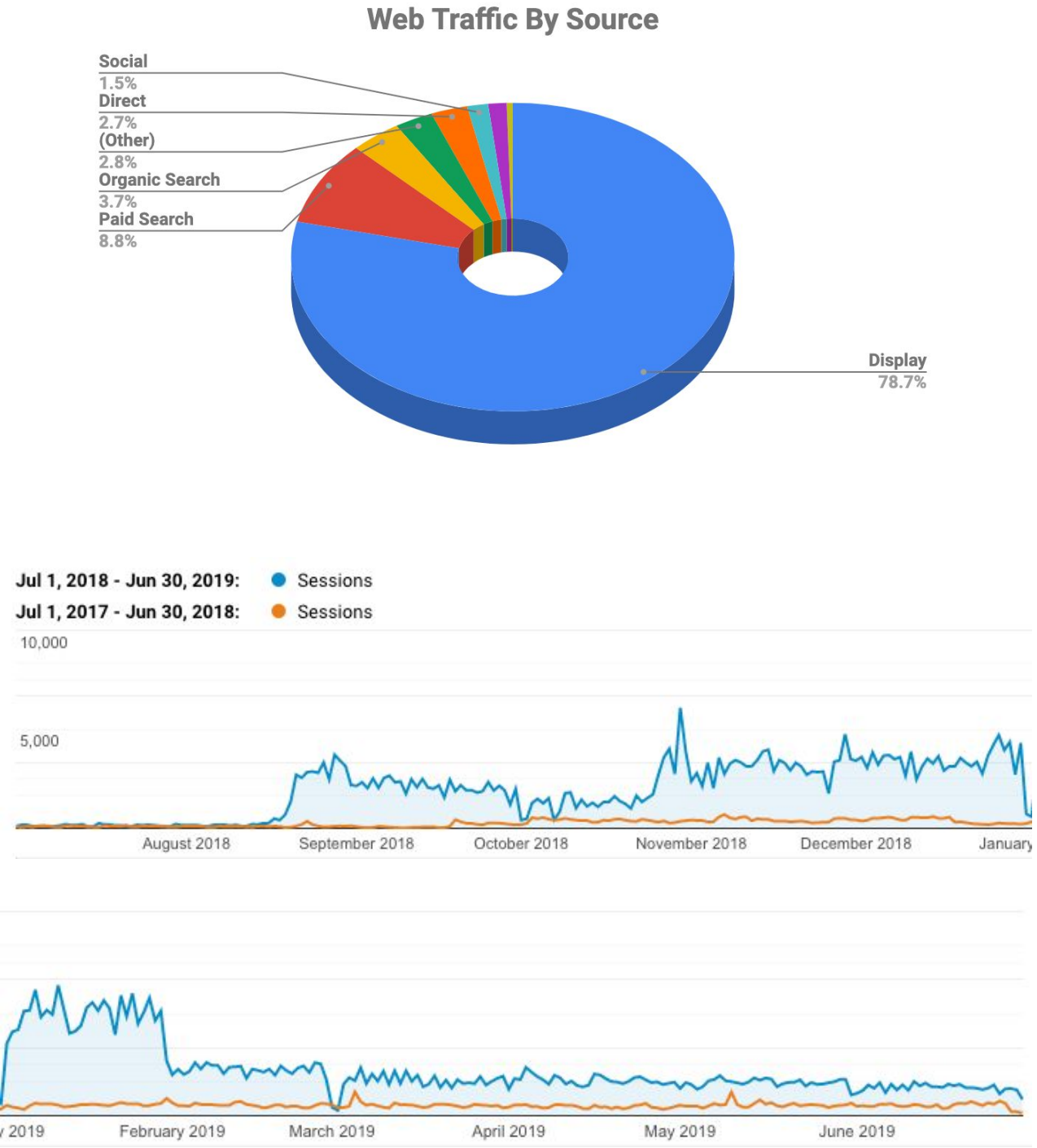
The majority of advertising spend and effort is invested in digital marketing, including email, social media, and paid search campaigns driving traffic to veteransflorida.org.

Other channels include public relations and traditional print advertising. The marketing team also planned and executed the Veterans Florida Expo.

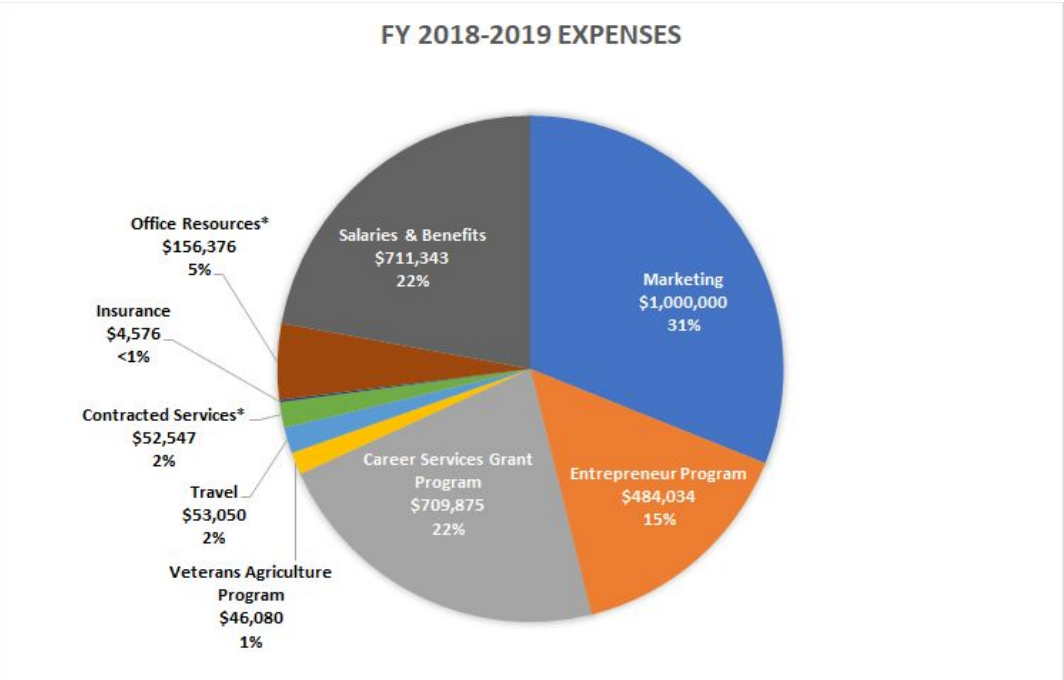
The marketing team has full web development, video production, and creative capabilities, allowing Veterans Florida to operate with the flexibility to quickly capitalize on opportunities and maximize our reach and impact. The team built our website, develops internal systems such as Salesforce, and creates all of the content distributed on social media and the web.

Prioritizing video content to keep up with current trends, the marketing team has built a large video catalog from venues around the state and produces regular video content for distribution on the web.

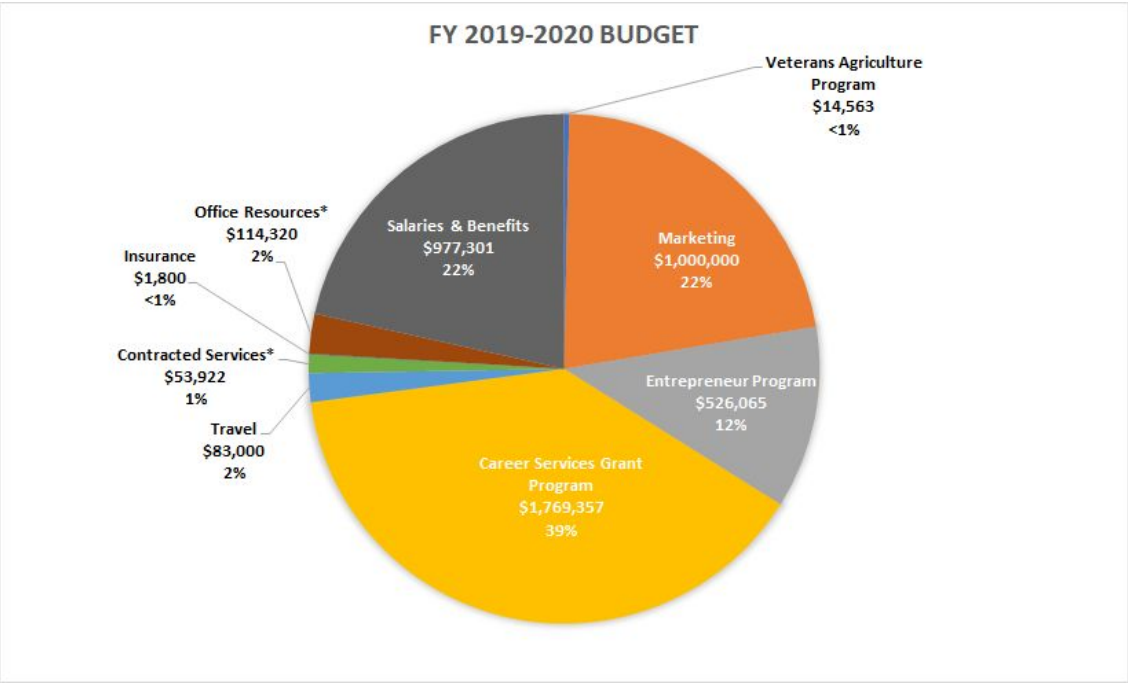
Metric	FY17-18	FY18-19	Growth
Total Unique Website Visitors	107,961	436,458	304.27%
Total Facebook Page Likes	83,318	83,576	0.31%
Email Newsletter Subscribers	17,325	42,794	147.01%
LinkedIn Followers	1,275	2,131	67.14%
Twitter Followers	368	599	62.77%



# Financial Summary



\*Office Resources include operational expenses such as office supplies and equipment, lease of office space, software, telecommunication services, printing, and postage. Contracted Services such as accounting, auditing services, HR/Payroll, legal services, and website development and management help support the organization’s internal operations.



## Contracts FY 2018-19

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

Date Contract Entered	Contractor	Service Provided	Amount	Date Contract Completed
6/16/2015	Carr, Riggs & Ingram	Auditing	\$10,800	9/30/2019
08/15/2018	BridgeWing, LLC	Contracted Facilitators for Entrepreneurship Program	\$14,904	3/31/2019
6/7/2019	MARCH Marketing, LLC	Marketing Consultation	\$25,000	6/30/2019
11/7/2018	Military Makeover, LLC	Marketing	\$49,700	4/30/2019
6/28/2018	GSD	Salesforce Software Initialization	\$32,800	12/31/2018
6/28/2018	Salesforce.org	Contact Management Software	\$7,170	7/1/2019

