



Your Pursuit • Our Power

Annual Report 2023

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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

December 1, 2023

It is my privilege to submit Veterans Florida's annual report for Fiscal Year 2022-23, which marks the ninth full year of operation. Our mission defined in Florida Statute is to attract and retain veterans and their families to our great state and to make Florida their permanent residence.

This year we began implementing 2021 House Bill 435, establishing the nation's first statewide SkillBridge initiative, and designating Veterans Florida as the state's principal Department of Defense SkillBridge awareness and assistance organization for the State. The Florida SkillBridge Initiative creates unprecedented opportunities for transitioning servicemembers across the country to come to Florida, builds a highly skilled talent pipeline for employers, and firmly plants Florida's flag as the top destination for military families. Veteran participation in Skillbridge in Florida substantially increased this year.

Our nationwide, veteran-focused marketing campaign brought more than 78,000 unique and returning visitors to our website, and provided veterans with information on the wide variety of benefits and opportunities available in Florida. The campaign's reach continued growth through increases in social media followers, email newsletter subscribers, and attracted more than 2,300 veterans seeking career assistance, training and education, and job placement.

The Veterans Florida Workforce Training Grant program remains popular. We have contracted with more than 120 businesses that have hired/trained more than 1,500 veterans. These veterans collectively have earned more than \$55 million in salary which goes directly back into Florida's economy.

Since the inception of the Veterans Florida Entrepreneurship Program in early 2016, it has served 4,975 veterans and provided training to 1,167 veteran-owned businesses.

The Board of Directors and staff of Veterans Florida take pride in accomplishing these important missions in a transparent and cost-effective manner. We always remember that we are entrusted with taxpayer dollars. I'm proud of what we have accomplished and that we continue our daily contacts with veterans leaning toward Florida as their new home. We are very excited for the future of this program to serve, attract, train, and educate veterans as they seek to build, grow, and prosper with their families 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 2022-2023

Appointed by the Governor



Warren R. “Rocky” McPherson, Chair

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



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



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 Chairman of the Community Advisory Board of the Salvation Army of Okaloosa and Walton County. He serves as Secretary of Catholic Charities of Northwest Florida and Chairs the Veterans Tribute Tower Committee. He is a member of the board of directors of the Air Force Enlisted Village (Bob Hope Village) and its assisted living facility, The Hawthorne House since 2015. Tom was named to the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame, Class of 2017.

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 reappointed him in 2019.



Angela Drzewiecki

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.

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 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.

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

Appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives



Robert M. Kirila, Vice-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.

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

and Speaker Chris Sprowls reappointed him in 2022.



Jerry L. Neff

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.

Speaker Richard Corcoran appointed General Neff to the Board of Directors in 2018, and Speaker Chris Sprowls reappointed him in 2022.



Alan J. Suskey, Secretary

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 to 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).

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.

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.

Derrick Fraser, 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.

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.

Keshia Valverde, 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 Coordinator - 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 Coordinator - 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 Coordinator - 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.

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 staff and board member 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.

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, Veterans Florida maintains 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 Veterans Florida workforce 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. Veterans Services Specialists or Coordinators reach 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.

During FY 2022-2023, a total of 2,307 veterans in Florida and from across the nation were served seeking career assistance or job placement in Florida. More than 120 employers used Veterans Florida Workforce or Career Services this year.

Workforce Grant Reimbursements FY 2016-23		
Fiscal Year	Trained	Reimbursements
FY 2015-16	1	\$2,520
FY 2016-17	117	\$476,070
FY 2017-18	187	\$687,483

Workforce Grant Reimbursements FY 2016-23		
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
Total	1,553	\$5,178,971

Florida SkillBridge Initiative

The DOD SkillBridge program allows 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, while retaining their full military pay and benefits and helping to ease their military separation and begin their new civilian career. In fiscal year 2020, Veterans Florida became an authorized DOD SkillBridge provider with our Agriculture Program in partnership with the University of Florida.



In 2021, Governor DeSantis signed a new law to create the nation's first statewide SkillBridge Initiative and designating Veterans Florida as the principal organization to execute the initiative. In fiscal year 2022, Veterans Florida continued to expand the program working with more than 100 employers. This past year 96 servicemembers completed SkillBridge training, 70 percent of whom came to Florida from other states or from overseas.

SkillBridge Program	
Fiscal Year	Trained
FY 2020-21	1
FY 2021-22	35
FY 2022-23	96
Total	132

Agriculture Program

For fiscal years 2020-23, Veterans Florida received a \$745,245 prime award from the United States Department of Agriculture AgVets Program to expand the Veterans Florida Agriculture Program and build on the success of a Pilot Program. Our objective for the NIFA award was for thirty (30) veterans to complete the program to become the next generation of Florida agricultural



leaders. Veterans Florida exceeded the program’s milestones with support from the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) and placed 34 veterans through training by the end of the program on August 31, 2023. Most of the veterans who completed the Agriculture Program were placed into related employment, started their own farms, or furthered their education in an agriculture-related degree. Additionally, we strengthened our outreach and developed relationships with thirteen (13) of the UF/IFAS Research and Education Centers (RECs) and demonstration sites around the state.

The Veterans Florida Agriculture Program’s six-month training fellowship provided veterans and servicemembers a comprehensive, hands-on experience and equipped them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be competitive for leading careers in Florida’s \$149 Billion agriculture industry. The hands-on training took place at the UF/IFAS RECs where cutting edge research and innovations in food safety, crop production, and disease-resistant plants played a vital role in advancing the industry.

Each research center developed a structured rotation plan to introduce veterans to different production methods and challenges such as trial planning, field/site preparations, preparing plant materials, trial maintenance, data collection, harvesting, and various cropping activities depending on season, crop, and individual

Agriculture Program			
Fiscal Year	Applications	Served	Trained
FY 2020-21	24	12	10
FY 2021-22	44	24	18
FY 2022-23	27	8	6
Total	95	44	34

research program needs. Veterans in this program earned an educational stipend through the AgVets funding. Veterans Florida worked with program participants to further their career at an agribusiness, working farm, or ranch after completing the training.

Entrepreneurship Program

One in four active duty servicemembers 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 training, facilitation, and mentorship designed to meet the veteran where they are in their entrepreneurial journey.

The Entrepreneurship Program conducted its seventh year of operation in Fiscal Year 2022-23. Since the inception of the program in early 2016, the program has received more than 6,500 applications from veterans across the state and served 4,975 veterans.



The program features several opportunities to meet the needs of veteran entrepreneurs at different stages of their entrepreneurial journey. This approach favors tailored training over information overload. Veterans can participate in cohort-based training, workshops, networking, 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 one of our entrepreneur partners.





Networking events provide veteran entrepreneurs opportunities to network with peers and connect with 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.

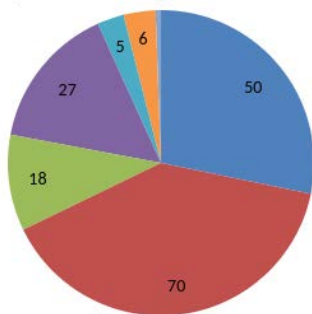
Entrepreneurship Program Partners FY 2022-23		
 Tampa	 Destin	 Jacksonville, Orlando, Panhandle, Space Coast, Tampa
 Boca Raton	 Fort Myers	 Bonita Springs
 Jacksonville	 Orlando	 Tampa
 Fort Lauderdale	 Tampa	 Orlando

Entrepreneurship Program Partners FY 2022-23

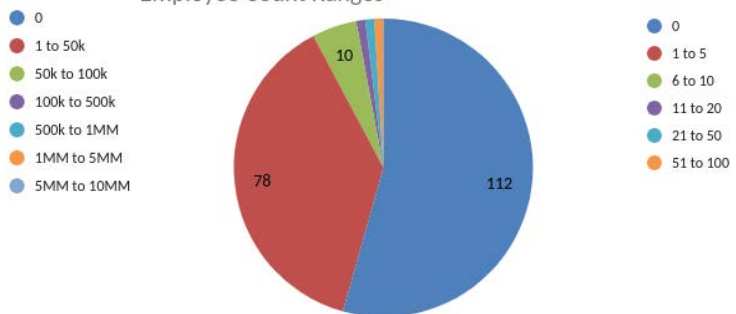
 an inspired work community Miami	 RISING TIDE INNOVATION CENTER St. Petersburg	 Miami
 Tampa		

Entrepreneur Program Participants Survey Respondents FYs 2020-23

Annual \$Revenue Ranges



Employee Count Ranges



Low Range Total: \$6,100,070

Low Range Total: 304

High Range Total: \$23,800,000

High Range Total: 830

Starting in 2022 respondents report ranges for revenue and employees for improved capture of metrics; this table reflects responses after completing Startup or Growth training. These results are from respondents who attended cohort training between FYs 2020-2023.

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 2019-20	304	108			
			Total	4,975	1,167

* 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; Entrepreneurship Training; and promoting Florida’s status as the nation’s top state for veterans, transitioning servicemembers, and their families. The marketing team also produces all content and executes all advertising for the Veterans Florida Expo each year in coordination with the administration and VETS teams. The target audience is servicemembers and veterans in the 12 months leading up to and following separation from the military.

The marketing team works closely with VISIT FLORIDA to carry out the annual marketing campaign. The marketing focus has shifted in recent years from high-volume web traffic to longer-form storytelling content, with a specific priority placed on LinkedIn. The success of that strategy is born out not only in engagement and audience size, but significant growth in targeted industries and demographics. Along with LinkedIn, email campaigns are primary drivers of inbound leads and Veterans Florida consistently outperforms competitors and industry averages in key metrics such as engagement and open rates. Other channels include public relations, traditional print advertising, radio, and paid search through Google’s \$10,000 per month AdGrants program.

The in-house writing team produces regular content around monthly themes highlighting our participants' success and opportunities in targeted Florida industries. These blog posts are among the highest-performing content pieces, and have contributed to earned media coverage in major target markets. The marketing team executes topical webinars with veterans, servicemembers, and economic development partners to promote our programs, answer questions, and increase visibility of Florida's veterans support initiatives.

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, handles all public relations, and creates all of the content distributed on social media and the web.

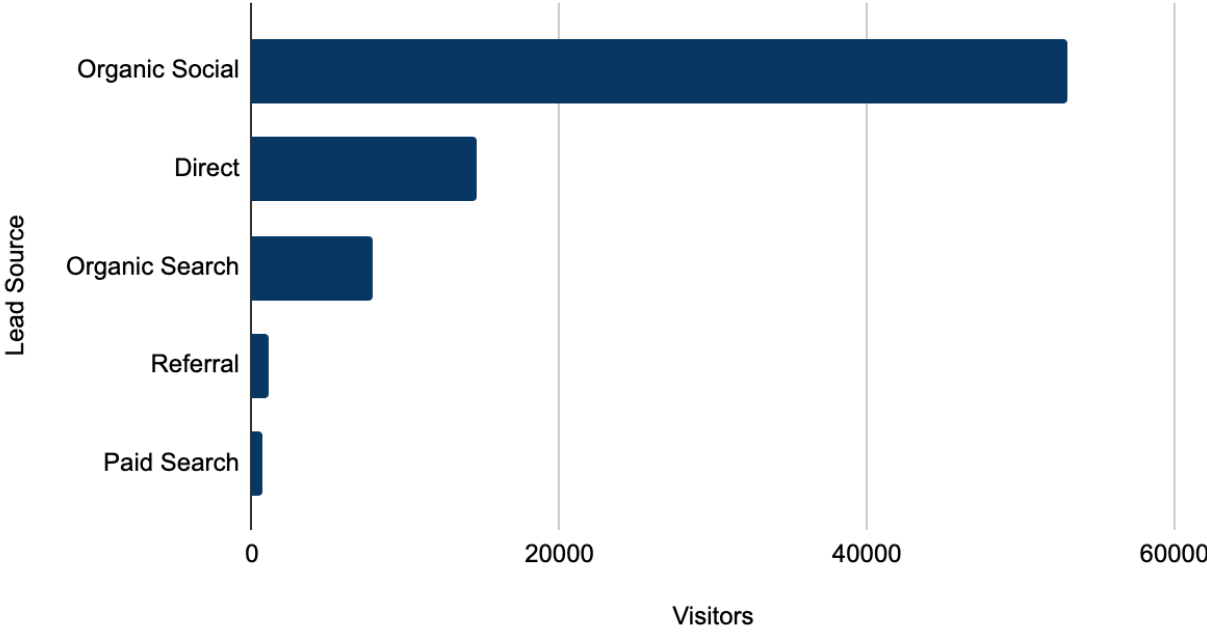
The 2023 Veterans Florida Expo moved to Tampa and was conducted on June 9 and 10. The two-day event featured 244 total attendees, 31 employers, 22 exhibitors, 28 speakers, and 15 pitch competitors in a statewide Battle of the Pitches. MK3 Industries won gold and received \$10,000, Jun Cyber took silver and won \$5,000, and OLGs won \$2,500 for bronze. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive from attendees, sponsors, and exhibitors.



Marketing Metrics				
	FY 21-22	FY 22-23	% Change	Notes
Total Unique Website Visitors	93,419	78,051	-19.69%	Google Analytics system changed. No data before Feb. 2023
Total Facebook Page Likes	79,317	78,394	-1.18%	Standard Facebook Scrub of Inactive Accounts
Email Newsletter Subscribers	33,725	26,750	-24.4%	Scrubbed Inactive Users

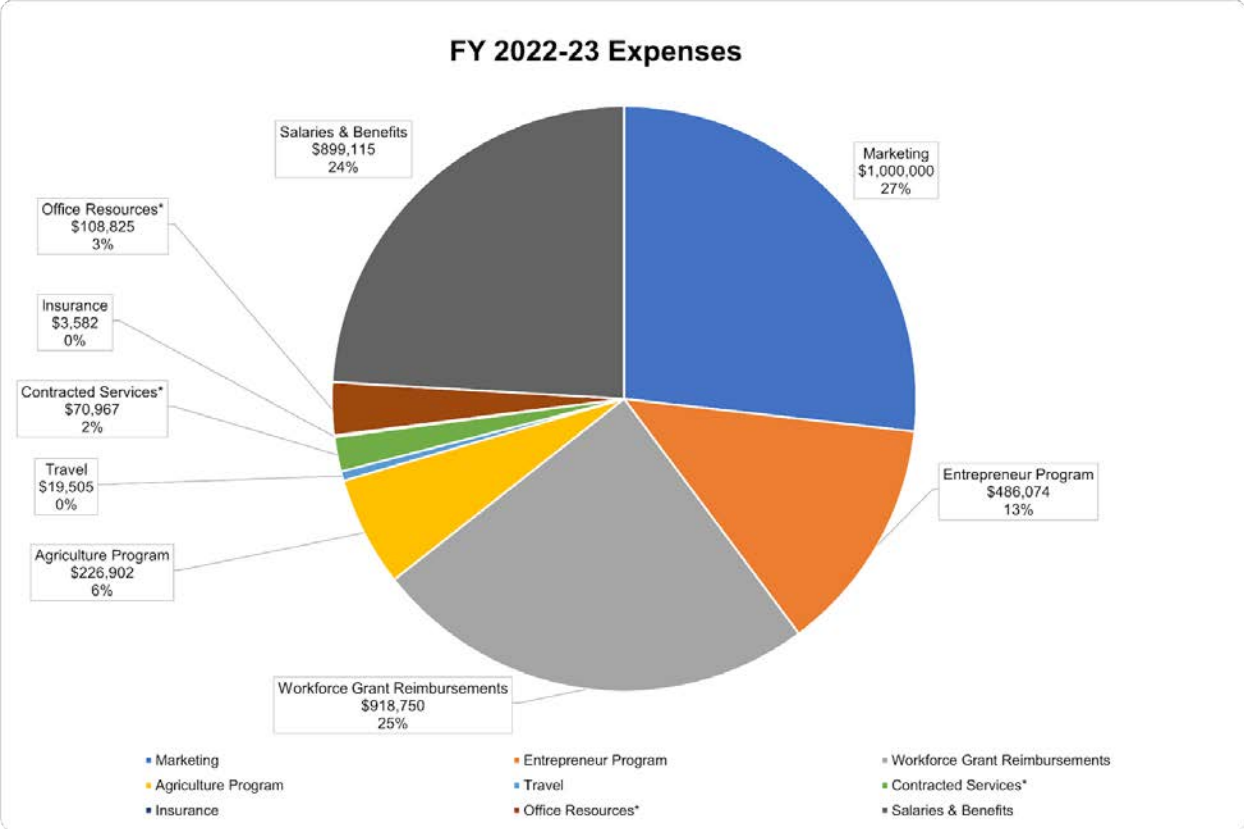
Marketing Metrics				
LinkedIn Followers	7,004	8,148	16.33%	Result of Prioritizing LinkedIn
Twitter Followers	785	844	7.52%	Result of increased activity
Instagram Followers	1,263	1,457	15.36%	Result of content optimization

Visitors - FY22-23

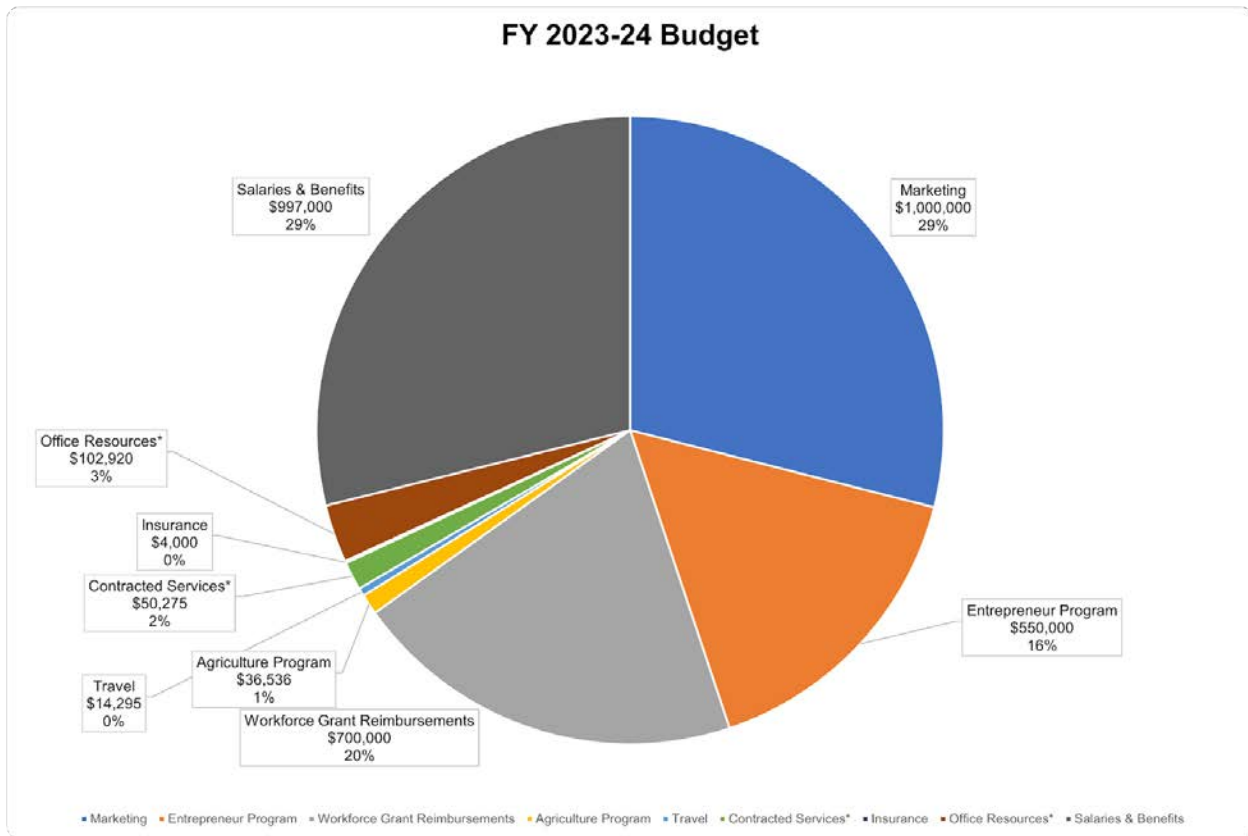


Financial Summary

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



*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 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
May 20, 2022	US Army Installation Management Command's G9 Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Division	2022 DoD Warrior Games Sponsor	\$25,000	Aug 29, 2022
July 6, 2022	Association of Defense Communities	2022 Sponsorship	\$5,000	Sept 23, 2022

Contracts				
July 25, 2022	Hilton Garden Inn Ft Walton Beach	Board Meeting Venue	\$400	Sept 21, 2022
July 25, 2022	Group Victory	Strategic Planning Consult	\$12,000	Nov 15, 2022
July 25, 2022	RecruitMilitary	Job Fair Registrations	\$8,685	Dec 15, 2022
Sept 29, 2022	Florida Veterans Foundation	Florida Veterans Benefits Guide Advertising	\$5,000	Dec 31, 2023
Oct 3, 2022	Capital IT, LLC	IT Network Upgrade	\$1,127	Oct 31, 2022
Oct 4, 2022	Hilton Tampa Airport Westshore	Expo Venue	\$20,000	June 11, 2023
Oct 7, 2022	Diversity Group & Associates	Agriculture Program Quarterly Audits	\$18,695	Oct 31, 2023
Oct 17, 2022	Doubletree by Hilton	Board Meeting Venue	\$250	March 15, 2023
Oct 24, 2022	A National Salute to America's Heroes, LLC	2023 Hyundai Air Sea Show Sponsorship	\$100,000	May 28, 2023
Nov 14, 2022	DocuSign	eSignature Software	\$2,393	Nov 8, 2023
Dec 14, 2022	PCB Entertainment, LLC	2023 Gulf Coast Jam Sponsorship	\$100,000	June 4, 2023
Jan 6, 2023	Sun 'n Fun Fly-In, Inc	2023 SUN 'n FUN Aerospace Expo Sponsorship	\$100,000	April 2, 2023

Contracts				
Feb 16, 2023	Silver Productions	Expo Video Production	\$5,750	June 30, 2023
June 22, 2023	Carr, Riggs & Ingram	Auditing & Form 990 Tax Preparation	\$13,610	Dec 31, 2023

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 (Year two of three)	\$249,310	Grant	Agriculture Program
Bank of America	\$20,000	Sponsorship	Expo Sponsor
Boeing	\$10,000	Sponsorship	Expo Sponsor
Career Source Florida	\$10,000	Sponsorship	Expo Sponsor
Concerned Veterans For America	\$1,000	Exhibitor	Expo Exhibitor
Florida Association of Veteran-Owned Businesses	\$1,000	Exhibitor	Expo Exhibitor
Learning Alliance Corporation	\$1,000	Exhibitor	Expo Exhibitor

Awards/Sponsorships			
SEA Experience	\$1,000	Exhibitor	Expo Exhibitor
Western Governors University	\$1,000	Exhibitor	Expo Exhibitor
Amazon - Tampa	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
AshBritt Inc.	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Associated Asphalt	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Aylstock, Witkin, Kreis & Overholtz	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Broward County Sheriff's Office	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Builders FirstSource	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Citrus County Sheriff's Office	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Creative Management Technology	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Florida International University	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
GardaWorld	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
General Dynamics Corporation	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Hillsborough County Aviation Authority	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Home Builders Institute Inc	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
HT Hackney Company	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Iron EagleX	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Kaman Aerospace Corporation	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Keiser University	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor

Awards/Sponsorships			
Navy Recruiting Reserve Command	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
NextEra Energy Inc	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Onward to Opportunity	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Orange County Sheriff's Office	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Palm Beach Sheriff Office	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
RoadSafe Traffic Systems, Inc.	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Sarasota County Government	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Tampa Armature Works	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Universal Orlando	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
University of West Florida/Haas Center	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
VetCor LLC	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Vets2PM, LLC	\$500	Exhibitor	Expo Employer Exhibitor
Other Supporters	\$735	Donation	General Mission
Total FY 2022-23	\$309,545		

Outlook

Veterans Florida SkillBridge initiative continues to gain momentum as it is becoming our best vehicle for retaining and attracting separating and retiring servicemembers and veterans to the state. We tripled the amount of placements into SkillBridge training over the year before, and more employers are signing up as they learn of the benefits to their workforce.

All funds from the Workforce Training Grant were disbursed to partnered employers ahead of schedule for the third straight year, allowing us to raise the bar on their training plans to strengthen military-to-employer talent pipelines and Florida's future veteran workforce. Additionally, overall budget savings allowed us to increase funds disbursed to employers to nearly \$1 million.

The Entrepreneurship Program served the most veterans in its seven-year history by expanding our footprint across the state to meet veterans where they are and at any stage of their venture. The success of adding new partners and increasing the cohort, coworking, and networking opportunities bear out in the quality of Florida veteran small business startups at the 2023 Battle of the Pitches, where proprietary inventors and software developers took the top spots in our largest and most competitive statewide pitch competition yet.

The 2023 Expo moved to Tampa this year, and the event attendance and visibility continued to grow as Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nunez joined us as our keynote speaker. The 2024 Expo will be June 7-8 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.

Our partnership with the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences for the Agriculture Program fulfilled the 2020-23 United States Department of Agriculture grant's mission, and we will reapply for the award after maintaining a 100 percent job offer rate to veteran graduates. Adding SkillBridge to the fellowship opened the door for servicemembers to apply, leading us to expand the program to more research farms across the state to keep pace with growing demand.

Equipped and guided by a new three-year strategic plan, Veterans Florida aims to build on the successes from 2022-23 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 to the powerful career and entrepreneurship tools, training, and resources that make Florida the nation's most veteran-friendly state.





VETERANS FLORIDA

Your Pursuit • Our Power