

LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

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Title of Program	Veterans Services Tracking and Management Program
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Description of Productivity Improvement

Challenged with primarily manual and very inefficient and outdated intake and tracking processes for the Veterans, the Cumberland County Veterans Services Department needed a solution that would streamline and automate those processes, maximize customer service to our Veterans and lean daily operations at little to no additional cost to the County. The Cumberland County Information Services Department, in collaboration with Veteran's Services, implemented a modernized Veteran tracking and management program, which replaced the practice of using multiple non-integrated systems. A 3rd party solution was selected to streamline and automate the intake and tracking processes "" to include sign-in procedures, VSO notifications, and required reporting. This solution also contains all the required VA forms, which is populated by the system data, speeding up the completion of the forms and minimizing paper usage. Secondary recommendations implemented to support this new program included activation of a 2nd fax line to reduce faxing times and configuration of the VoIP phones to allow more functionality.

Description of why this project was initiated

There were 49,239 Veterans in Cumberland County in 2015, making up over 15% of our population. This percentage is higher than the larger North Carolina counties, such as Forsyth, Guilford, Mecklenburg and Wake. Over 8,600 Veterans from Cumberland and surrounding counties were assisted by and filed claims through the Cumberland County Veteran's Services office. The compensation and pensions provided to our Veterans from claims processed have increased by 70.4% over the last 5 years. The substantial workload produced from these claims is maintained by 5 Veterans Services Officers, a receptionist and 3 part-time work studies.

There were also upcoming military drawdowns of over 10,000 soldiers, and a loss of over 17,000 civilian jobs, with an unknown impact to our military base at Ft. Bragg. There was concern that the drawdowns could cause a major increase in spousal and dependent claims as well. In addition to the drawdowns, the state Veteran's Affairs office in the area was scheduled to close in March 2016, which was projected to redirect an estimated 1,080 additional Veterans to the Cumberland County Veteran's Services office. Due to the expected increase in the already substantial workload, 2 additional staff positions were requested.

Under previous conditions, the Veteran intake and tracking processes were manual. Veteran's Services staff were wasting extensive amounts of time and resources due to inefficient and labor-intensive intake, tracking and reporting processes, and were duplicating work on weekly and monthly reports. There was excessive paper usage due to these methods, and the average error rate in intake logging was 15%.

It was imperative that improvement opportunities for the intake and tracking process be considered to streamline operations, and provide a leaner, more efficient and effective program to maximize customer service for our Veterans and ensure sustainability of the department. The new program was projected to result in a higher level of service delivered at the same or comparable cost, avoidance of future cost increases, and would use sustainable products and practices to provide new and expanded services to the Veterans of Cumberland County.

Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).

Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings

The new Veteran Services Tracking and Management Program eliminated 22 of 44 steps, saved over 40 minutes per visit by the Veterans, over 2 hours of daily processing time, and eliminated the 15% error rate in intake logging. Automation of reporting, which was included in this program, eliminated the 5-7 days previously required to compile the data for the required monthly reports. As a direct result of this implementation, a total of 5,007 annual labor hours were saved, which is more than equivalent to 2 full time positions, therefore eliminating the need for the 2 positions previously requested. These hours will be reallocated to enhance operational support and expand scanning initiatives. The value of the labor hours reclaimed at no additional cost to the County is \$86,828. Major improvements in operational efficiencies were immediately realized and will continue to be monitored. Implementation of the intake and tracking program has resulted in a higher level of service delivered at a comparable annual cost and ensures avoidance of future cost increases. It has also allowed us to provide new and expanded services to the Veterans of Cumberland County by improving customer service, streamlining and automating Veteran intake and tracking, digitizing required VA forms for faster completion, and minimizing the paper-driven processes.

Other descriptive information

For many years, the manual processes involved in the intake and tracking process for the Veterans has hindered productivity and efficiency in the Veteran's Services Department. Department staff were unable to track Veterans throughout the visit and the receptionist was unable to track the status of the Veteran Services Officers (VSOs). The receptionist was required to call the VSO or walk to the VSO's desk to determine if he/she was available. This had a negative impact on customer service because Veterans would have to wait at an empty desk until the receptionist could return to assist them.

The process was also paper-driven. The receptionist would have to provide paper forms for the Veteran to complete, there were multiple hand-offs between the Veterans Services staff, and everything was ultimately stored in a paper filing system. Monthly reports required manual counting from the daily intake sheets, which was very tedious and time-consuming. Discrepancies often occurred in the report data due to incomplete intake sheets with missing information.

The new Veteran Services Tracking and Management Program has automated the tasks previously completed manually by the receptionist. The paper-driven processes are automated and the files are digital. Through the automated intake and tracking system, the Veteran is checked-in by the receptionist and the VSO receives a notification on their screen that there is a client waiting. The receptionist can provide better customer service because she no longer needs to leave her desk to notify a VSO that a Veteran is waiting. Due to the time saved from the new intake and tracking program, the receptionist can also provide additional support as needed throughout the office.

The VSO can now review the Veteran's file and additional notes within the system; can time the visit; can retrieve and complete the VA forms within the system; and can print only what's needed for signatures and faxing to the VA. The final documents are stored digitally to eliminate the need for storage of paper copies. The steps previously required of the VSO have been streamlined and fully automated. Workflow allows for proper Veteran tracking and eliminates errors that were present when using manual intake and tracking processes.