

# UTAH DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS & MILITARY AFFAIRS STRATEGIC PLAN 2024



Welcome to the Utah Department of Veterans & Military Affairs! This strategic planning document provides overall guidance and direction for the accomplishment of our current work and where we are going in the future as we continue to perform our mission and serve the citizens of Utah.

## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

We are honored to be serving the men and women who have served our country! It is the fundamental reason that our Department exists, and I am proud that you are part of this effort.

In 2021, Governor Spencer Cox during his inauguration laid out his six major roadmap principles for the state such as economic opportunity, education, rural, health security, inclusion and efficiency. In 2023, Governor Cox put out a new focus called Utah Home which capitalizes on the successes over the past two years, which lays out the priorities of people, growth and good government. Each one of them resonates with what we do in our department.

We accomplish our mission in a variety of ways performing functions across our entire great State, in serving veterans, military members, their family members and supporting the military installations in Utah. At the same time, we need to ensure that we are good stewards of the funds and responsibilities that have been entrusted to us, and that we carry out our duties in a forthright compassionate, responsible and efficient way.

We perform our mission through a number of guiding values that we coined as RESPECT, and with these values and the goals that we are focused on achieving, we will continue to be a high performing team for those we serve. I challenge each one of us to be bold, innovative and responsible in all that we do and to foster a culture which is respectful, efficient and inclusive.

Again, thanks for being part of this Department and the service you render.

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs enriches the lives of Veterans, service members, and their families and grows the military workload in Utah, by offering innovative programs and services, promoting military and veteran friendly communities and collaborating with partners.

## VISION

Utah is the best state in the nation to perform military missions and the premier location for Veterans, service members and their families to live, work, and play.

# VALUES

In the performance of our duties, we follow enduring values that are the watchwords for all we do. They are our beacons to what we do. They are organized around the word **RESPECT**.

## **Respect** and honor for those we serve

- We have the distinct privilege of serving veterans, service members, their families and working with military members, civilians and contractors who work on military installations and support those that do. We know freedom is not free, and we treat all who engage in maintaining that freedom with respect and honor.

## **Effectiveness** of services

- We owe it to those we serve and those we work with to ensure our programs and efforts are effective, both in terms of outcomes and cost. We strive to maintain them and improve them.

## **Solidarity** and teamwork

- What we do is a “team sport.” We are stronger as we work together, ensuring the team is performing at an extremely high level. We focus on the mission, vision and goals to guide us forward and we work in an environment that is positive and inclusive.

## **Proactive** and innovative

- We ensure we have the right effort, for the right challenge, at the right time. We are innovative and anticipate what needs to be in place, seemingly before it is needed. We are creative, responsive and cost-effective.

## **Excellence** in everything

- Whether it is a one-on-one contact or a large group, whether it is an internal or external, whether it is a claims submission or a meeting or a recognition event, whether it is engagement with a veteran, a resident in one of our homes, a member of the Congressional delegation, legislature or senior military leadership, whether it is a budget submission or committee hearing, whatever it is we want it to be excellent. And in the times when it is less than our standard, we take responsibility, learn from it and move forward.

## **Collaboration** with partners, stakeholders and champions

- We are proud to collaborate with partners, stakeholders and champions across the state and nation in the accomplishment of our duties. We grow and foster these relationships and eagerly welcome new opportunities.

## **Trust** and transparency

- Trust is earned by respect and truthfulness. We strive to be respected as a trusted organization both by those within the department and by those we serve. Transparency fosters that trust and enables us to be more effective.

# GOALS

What we want to achieve throughout the department is captured by our overall goals, both internal to the department and external for those we interact with and serve. They are a guide for what we do every day and should provide an azimuth check to make decisions and what we do - does the activity support one of our goals? Our goals are:

1. Maintain Utah's reputation as a state that fully supports veterans, service members and their families.
2. Connect with veterans, military members and their families across the state
3. Have benefits, programs and initiatives that are responsive, timely and effective
  4. Honor and recognize those we serve
  5. Continue to position the state as a preferred location for military missions and operations.
  6. Foster ongoing engagement with partners, stakeholders, and champions
  7. Seek out new opportunities
  8. Operate the Department efficiently and effectively
9. Foster a culture where department members are valued and respected

# STRATEGIES

The following strategies are overall actions for the department at an operational level. Deputy directors and functional managers are encouraged to develop additional ones for their areas.

- Utilize the synergy between Veterans and military affairs to leverage resources and develop innovative solutions to benefit both communities.
- Continue to engage with military personnel and their families to support their needs and recognize their contributions.
- Adopt best practices, optimize resources, and improve processes.
- Foster additional partnerships and deeper relationships to leverage the strengths of all as we identify gaps, implement initiatives and seek new opportunities
- Work continually with military leaders across the state and in DC
- Have members of the department serving on appropriate boards, committees and associations both locally and nationally
- Ensure the department continues to be viewed as a welcoming, supportive and respectful place of employment for all
- Conduct regular reviews of the efforts outlined in this document both with the senior department team and all members of the department

# OBJECTIVES & PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Knowing where we are going, how we are getting there and how we are doing are vital to us. The following elements combine objectives and performance measures together and they are presented in the same order as our goals. We do recognize that several of the objectives and measures could and do cross over into other goals, which supports the idea that we have a joint mission of veterans and military and one effort that supports one area could support another.

## 1. Maintain Utah's reputation as a state that fully supports veterans, service members and their families (Goal)

- a. Landing Zone Utah marketing campaign active (Objective)
  - i. Performance Measure (PM): Rolled out by Veterans Day 2024
  - ii. PM: Increase the number of Veterans 25-45 years old in the state within two years
- b. Seamless transition from military to veteran status effort is responsive and effective
  - i. Virtual efforts on department website available by Spring 2025
  - ii. Initial Transition Excellence Center operational by Fall 2025
  - iii. Develop financial resilience initiative by Nov 2024
  - iv. PM: Increase the number of separating service members choosing Utah
- c. Support employment efforts for Veterans, Military and their families
  - i. Continue partnership with DWS and business community
  - ii. Provide continued support for Accelerated Commitment to Employment program
  - iii. PM: Maintain the Veteran unemployment rate in Utah below the state average
- d. Support military installation programs that encourage belonging
  - i. Support Hill Air Force Base's Project One
  - ii. Include "Welcome to Utah" effort on department website by Fall 2024

## 2. Connect with veterans, military members and their families across the state (Goal)

- a. Initiate a Military and Veteran family support program during FY2025
- b. Ensure connection and stationing of Veterans Service Officers across the state
  - i. Leverage partnerships with organizations and agencies across Utah
  - ii. Develop initiatives for reaching veterans in rural areas
  - iii. PM: Increase number of veterans in rural areas connected to services
  - iv. PM: Department Veterans Service Officers process an average of 400 claims per month
- c. Expand reach of digital communication platforms (e.g department website, social media, email campaigns).
  - i. PM: Achieve a 20% increase in monthly website traffic over the next six months
  - ii. PM: Increase social media followers by 20% and achieve a 10% increase in average

- engagement rate across all platforms within the next six months
- iii. PM: Achieve a 5% increase in email open rates and a 5% increase in click-through rates for departmental email campaigns within the next six months
- d. Increase the number of Current Conflict veterans aware/connected to benefits
  - i. Develop coordinated plan to connect with Current Conflict Veterans by Fall 2024
  - ii. PM: Increase Current Conflict veterans connected by 25% by 2026
- e. Institute Five-year veterans claims reviews by FY2025
  - i. PM: 75% of veterans in Utah are connected (VA, UDVMA, etc.,)
- f. Grow the number of Veterans in Utah that are connected
  - i. 75% of Veterans are connected (VA, UDVMA, etc.)
- g. VSOs effectively process disability claims for veterans
  - i. Average 400 claims per month during FY2025
- h. Grow VA compensation and pension to support the well-being of veterans
  - i. PM: Increase annually by \$40MM throughout the state

### **3. Have benefits, programs and initiatives that are responsive, timely and effective (Goal)**

- a. Efforts to support mental wellness and suicide prevention are identified and in-place (Governor's Challenge).
  - ii. Access to services and programs are widespread
  - iii. Additional partners and relationships are in-place by Spring 2025
- b. Utah Patriot Program is expanded (employment, education, communities)
  - i. PM: Increase program participants to 2,500
- c. Support Veterans in business efforts
  - i. Work with the business community, SBA, chambers of commerce and others
  - ii. Institute Small Business Registry website to connect people with Veteran Owned Businesses during FY2025
  - iii. Continue support for Veterans Business Resource Center
    - 1. PM: Mentoring for over 300 Veterans annually
  - iv. Support Annual Veterans Business Summit in May 2024
- d. State Approving Agency effectively coordinates with Utah institutions that receive GI Bill educational funding.
  - i. PM: Conduct 2,800 program approvals, 650 technical assistance visits and 75 outreach visits per year
- e. Veterans nursing homes are operating efficiently and positioned for the future.
  - i. PM: Maintain a nursing home occupancy at 97% and secure five-star ratings for all homes
  - ii. Continue to prioritize efforts to replace the Salt Lake Veterans Home
  - iii. Maximize participation Construction Improvement Program
- f. Support Utah State Parks in the administration of Utah State Parks Honor Passes and the Veterans Honor Pass Pilot Project
- g. Administer and promote the Veterans First Time Home-Buyer program in conjunction with Utah Housing Corporation
  - i. PM: Distribute the \$500,000 to eligible candidates

- h. Continue partnership with Attorney General's Office for Utah@Ease Pro-bono Legal Service
  - i. PM: Support 400 Veterans with services per year
- i. Continue collaboration with Unclaimed Property to return lost and missing property
- j. Be responsive to military installation needs
  - i. Have regular interaction with military leadership to understand needs and opportunities
- k. Work with state agencies and legislature to implement appropriate programs

#### **4. Honor and recognize those we serve**

- a. The Bluffdale Veterans Cemetery continues to be a place of honor for those who have served in the military and their spouses
  - ii. Bluffdale Veterans Cemetery has additional capacity to honor veterans
  - iii. Initiate efforts to continue to make cemetery efficient
- b. The state is operating a Northern Utah Veterans Cemetery by 2027
- c. Maintain the quality rating at our four state veterans nursing homes.
  - i. PM: CMS 5-Star rating obtained annually
- d. Support the Utah committee's efforts for the commissioning of the Navy's USS Utah submarine
  - i. Christening and commissioning by 2026
- e. Host and support events related to Veteran and Military holidays and recognitions (e.g Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Armed Forces Day, Service Member of the Year, Fallen Warrior, etc.,)...)
  - i. Hold successful recognition events that are respectful, well received by participants and with positive media coverage

#### **5. Utah remains a preferred location for military missions and operations.**

- a. Awareness and Implementation of Department of Defense priority efforts in Utah
  - i. Continuous involvement and interaction with senior military and defense civilian leadership
- b. Strategies developed for state support of growth at Hill AFB working with state, federal, business, local and academic partners
- c. Partner with military leaders to implement efforts focused on military families
- d. Ensure areas around installations are free of encroachment on military missions
  - i. Stand up the Great Salt Lake Sentinel Landscape team during 2025
  - ii. Continue to explore methods to prevent encroachment on military missions
- e. Continue to engage with MIDA for support of military land development
  - i. Falcon Hill, MWR Hotel, Sundance Military Veterans Project continue to develop
  - ii. New opportunities identified
- f. Support efforts for Reserves to relocate into new operational space and the transfer of Fort Douglas to University of Utah
- g. Civilian workforce supporting military missions meets demand and is stable
- h. Continued support for organizations that support military missions in Utah
  - i. Utah Defense Alliance
  - ii. Utah Aerospace and Defense Association



- iii. Military Affairs Committees
- iv. Blue Star Family
- v. USO

## **6. Foster ongoing engagement with partners, stakeholders, and champions**

- a. Continue robust outreach to Legislative and Congressional partners
- b. Engage with Associations and Organizations that foster completion of our missions
- c. Ensure Department members serve on appropriate national and local association boards and committees that complement our mission
- d. Provide financial support as appropriate to veterans and military organizations

## **7. Seek out new opportunities**

- a. Transition Excellence Center operational
  - ii. Discover what new programs are necessary for transition success
  - iii. Develop short video reference state benefits for TAP class
- b. Explore MIDA involvement at additional military installations
- c. Expand success of Military Children Education Specialist efforts
- d. Partner with federal, state and local organizations to engage in rural Utah
- e. Develop a new veterans cemetery in Northern Utah to better serve veterans in that geographic region
- f. Foster new partnerships and relationships where we haven't engaged before

## **8. Operate the Department efficiently and effectively**

- a. Publish updated department policy letters each April
- b. Performance on audits and survey meet established standards
  - i. PM: Ensure any audit findings are within accepted limits
  - ii. Take effective corrective actions when we fall short
- c. Leverage technology
  - i. The Utah Veterans Information System is responsive to needs and leveraged for effect (SQL, Oracle, and CRM)
  - ii. PM: Expand use of "paperless" efforts and CRM for department functions
- d. Department relocates to new space to maximize effectiveness
- e. Meet budget submission deadlines as established by GOPB and LFA
  - i. PM: Operate within established appropriations and authorities
- f. Develop robust privacy policies for the department during FY2025
- g. Conduct Quarterly financial, operational, risk and safety reviews
- h. Effectively implement divisions of new statutes each year
- i. Review strategic plan regularly with senior team and annually with entire department

## **9. Ensure department members are valued and respected**

- a. Inclusive, positive and respectful office environment is maintained
- b. Maintain an open-door policy
- c. Optimize pay for performance
- d. Provide regular feedback and communications to team members
- e. Design and implement employee survey

# FY2025 ANNUAL WORK PLAN

- Connect Business Registry with UVIS for verification of Vet status
- Select CRM for VSOs
- Distribute benefits card (H.C.R. 12) to employers and organizations
- Create webfacing dashboards with Veteran data for the public to increase transparency
- Develop, design and launch initial model of Transition Excellence Center
- Develop financial resiliency training for transitioning service members
- Implement Great Salt Lake Sentinel Landscape program
- Implement military family program
- Conduct and support commemoration, recognition and special events honoring and assisting Veterans, service members and their families:
  - Patriot Day September 11, 2024
  - Veterans Summit October 2024
  - Veterans Day November 11, 2024
  - Wreaths Across America Dec 14, 2024
  - Military Day On the Hill, Feb 7, 2025
  - Fallen Warriors Family Recognition, Feb 2025
  - Service Member of the Year on the Hill, Feb 7, 2025
  - Womens' Veterans Recognition, March 14, 2025
  - Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day, March 29, 2025
  - Service Member of the year Ceremony May 2025
  - Veterans Business Summit, May 9, 2025
  - Armed Forces Day, May 17, 2025
  - Memorial Day, May 26, 2025
  - Utah Veteran Service Organization conferences (American Legion, VFA, DFW) June 2025
- Salt Lake Replacement Home
  - All documents submitted (project shovel ready)
- Veterans Homes
  - Submit CIP requests
  - Annual inventory of property
- Future Northern Utah Veterans Cemetery (Washington Terrace)
  - Perimeter survey completed
  - Master plan started
- Determine need for future ongoing state appropriations for operations
- Current Utah Veterans Cemetery (Bluffdale)
  - Extend the Honor Wall for future growth and improve the courtyard.
  - Contract with a landscape company to support spring cleanup work
  - CIP submission of Committal structure
- Participate in regular engagement with military leaders in Utah and nationally
- Participate in appropriate conferences, meetings, associations and forums to foster the department's mission and State of Utah (NASDVA, ADC, WRP, NASVA, NASAA, UDA, etc)
- Implement and launch Landing Zone Utah
- Conduct quarterly reviews
- Continue development and implementation of P4P, Strategic Plan and Risk Management lash-up
- Implement Provisions of HB335 and 261