

# UTAH DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS & MILITARY AFFAIRS STRATEGIC PLAN 2025



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

Clarity regarding our direction, progress, and effectiveness is paramount. The following objectives and performance measures are aligned with our strategic goals. Recognizing the interconnectedness of our mission, we acknowledge that certain objectives and measures may contribute to multiple goals, reinforcing our unified commitment to veterans and military affairs.

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

- **Objective:** To activate the Landing Zone Utah marketing campaign, attracting and retaining veterans, while simultaneously streamlining and enhancing the military-to-veteran transition process through a comprehensive support system featuring a physical Transition Excellence Center, robust online resources, and targeted financial resilience initiatives.
- **Objective:** Strengthen employment opportunities for veterans, military personnel, and their families by fostering strategic partnerships with the Department of Workforce Services and the business community, and by continuing to provide robust support for the Accelerated Commitment to Employment program.
- **Objective:** Foster a sense of belonging and community for military personnel and their families at Utah's military installations through support of initiatives like Hill Air Force Base's Project One.

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

- **Objective:** Initiate a Military and Veteran family support program during Fiscal Year 2025.
- **Objective:** Strategically place and connect Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) across the state while leveraging partnerships with organizations and agencies throughout Utah to develop initiatives to reach veterans in rural areas.
- **Objective:** Expand digital presence and engagement across all platforms to connect with a broader audience and increase awareness of our services and resources.
- **Objective:** Optimize the veterans claims process to ensure efficient and effective service delivery, resulting in increased connection to benefits and improved financial well-being for Utah veterans.

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

- **Objective:** Identify and implement efforts to support mental wellness and suicide prevention.
- **Objective:** Ensure widespread access to services and programs.
- **Objective:** Expand the Utah Patriot Program (employment, education, communities).
- **Objective:** Support veteran business initiatives by collaborating with the business community, SBA, chambers of commerce, and other entities and continuing support for the Veterans Business Resource Center.
- **Objective:** Ensure the State Approving Agency effectively coordinates with Utah institutions receiving GI Bill educational funding.
- **Objective:** Ensure veterans nursing homes operate efficiently and are positioned for the future.
- **Objective:** Continue prioritizing efforts to replace the Salt Lake Veterans Home.
- **Objective:** Maximize participation in the Construction Improvement Program.
- **Objective:** Administer and promote the Veterans First Time Home-Buyer program in conjunction with the Utah Housing Corporation.
- **Objective:** Continue the partnership with the Attorney General's Office for Utah@Ease Pro-bono Legal Service.
- **Objective:** Maintain regular interaction with military leadership to understand needs and opportunities.

### 4. Honor and recognize those we serve

- **Objective:** Ensure the Bluffdale Veterans Cemetery continues to be a place of honor for veterans and their spouses.
- **Objective:** Establish a Northern Utah Veterans Cemetery by 2027.
- **Objective:** Maintain the quality rating of our four state veterans nursing homes.
- **Objective:** Support the Utah committee's efforts for the commissioning of the Navy's USS Utah submarine.
- **Objective:** 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.).

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

- **Objective:** Maintain continuous interaction with senior military and defense civilian leadership, ensuring awareness and implementation of Department of Defense priority efforts in Utah.
- **Objective:** Develop collaborative strategies with state, federal, business, local, and academic partners to support growth at Hill AFB, while ensuring the continued development of Falcon Hill, the MWR Hotel, and the Sundance Military Veterans Project.
- **Objective:** Ensure areas around installations are free of encroachment, continue to

explore methods to prevent encroachment, and engage with MIDA for support of military land development, while establishing the Great Salt Lake Sentinel Landscape team during 2025.

- **Objective:** Partner with military leaders to implement family-focused efforts and provide continued support for organizations that bolster military missions in Utah, including the Utah Defense Alliance, Utah Aerospace and Defense Association, Military Affairs Committees, and Blue Star Families.
- **Objective:** Support efforts for Reserves to relocate into new operational space, facilitate the transfer of Fort Douglas to the University of Utah, and ensure the civilian workforce supporting military missions meets demand and is stable.
- **Objective:** Proactively identify and explore new opportunities to enhance military affairs and support veterans within Utah.

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

- **Objective:** Build and nurture relationships with Legislative and Congressional partners through active and consistent communication.
- **Objective:** Collaborate and actively engage with Associations and Organizations that support the accomplishment of our mission, ensuring department representation on relevant national and local association boards and committees, and providing financial support when appropriate.

## 7. Seek out new opportunities

- **Objective:** Establish an operational Transition Excellence Center, discover and implement new programs for transition success, develop short video references for state benefits in TAP classes, and expand the success of Military Children Education Specialist efforts.
- **Objective:** Partner with federal, state, and local organizations to engage in rural Utah, foster new partnerships and relationships, and explore MIDA involvement at additional military installations.
- **Objective:** Develop a new veterans cemetery in Northern Utah to better serve veterans in that geographic region.

## 8. Operate the Department efficiently and effectively

- **Objective:** Maintain up-to-date department policies, ensure successful audits and surveys, meet budget deadlines, adhere to appropriations and authorities, and implement new statutes effectively.
- **Objective:** Advance technology utilization, optimize the Utah Veterans Information System, expand paperless processes, and develop strong privacy policies.
- **Objective:** Conduct regular financial, operational, risk, and safety reviews, relocate the department for improved efficiency, and ensure consistent strategic plan reviews.

## 9. Ensure department members are valued and respected

- **Objective:** Foster a positive and inclusive workplace culture through consistent respectful interactions, maintaining an open-door policy, and providing regular feedback and communication to team members.
- **Objective:** Enhance employee engagement and performance by optimizing pay for performance and implementing a comprehensive employee survey to inform improvements.