



**Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs
Customer Service Annual Report**

Contributors

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FY17 Highlights

The Department of Veterans Affairs Customer Service Promise describes our approach.

FY17 highlights include:

Correspondence tracking and time to resolution (electronic, telephone, written and in person):

- Twenty-four hour turn around on correspondence
- All identified customer service survey responses receive individualized contacts

Customer Service Training:

- Cemetery, Outreach and Service Program staff received face to face customer service, self-care, and suicide prevention resource training
- Remainder of staff completed HUB customer service training
- 97% training completion rate by August 1, 2017 (balance of employees were on extended leave)

Processing times of agency services:

- MDVA does not process online transactions outside of a Charlotte Hall Veterans Home donation button

Online publication updates and Frequently Asked Questions:

- Website updates are made on a weekly basis or as necessary, immediate
- Department is compiling FAQ's for placement on website

Social media engagement:

- Social media posts are made in alignment with electronic newsletter event notifications
- Expanded social media 'tagging' to reach more customers

Customer Experience Survey and Results:

- Survey results are shared weekly with Executive Staff and Directors
- Individual contact made to all identified survey respondents
- Survey responses shared with Directors for immediate intervention and resolution

Recognition Given to Employees

October 2016

Ronnie Hooten Santiago, Veterans Benefits Specialist
Governor's Citation

Military personnel and veterans play an important role in our nation's history and future. The recent passing of HR 790 allows for property tax exemption in Washington County for veterans with a permanent service connected disability rating of 50% or greater. With this understanding, Ronnie made the commitment to ensure that every veteran who visited the Hagerstown Office was aware of this change.

Ronnie completes the applications on behalf of veterans and mails them to MDVA in Baltimore for signature. He then coordinates the application's return to the Washington County Assessment Office. This change initially effected 104 veterans who reside in the Washington County Area. He also took the opportunity to assess each veteran's needs to ensure that every veteran who is entitled to this benefit is receiving all VA benefit entitlements. His support and loyalty to the veterans helps to carry out our nation's spirit of promise during these challenging times and is a shining example of the Governor's promise to provide exemplary customer service in Maryland.

Leadership Analysis of FY17 and Summary of FY18 Approach

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) is committed to providing exceptional customer service. With approximately 80 employees, from cemetery caretakers to program directors, the Department is diligent in its service to both internal and external stakeholders. Our primary constituency, the men and women who have served this nation, are deserving of nothing less than outstanding care as they seek benefits earned through military service.

The MDVA front line cemetery program staff were the first to receive customer service training. Cemetery personnel were selected to first receive training given the extreme physical and emotional demands placed upon their positions. Training consisted of customer service but also suicide prevention awareness, self-care, and resource education. The Department had a 97% training completion rate by August 1, 2017.

The Department, as of June 30, had 61 customer service survey responses. As of this date, 77% of respondents indicated being 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with their MDVA experience. Lessons learned from 'very dissatisfied' respondents were that most were reporting dissatisfaction with their experience with the US Department of Veterans Affairs (USVA), not with MDVA.

Moving forward into FY18 the MDVA will continue in its commitment to providing outstanding customer service and delivery of the Maryland Customer Service Promise. The Department hopes to acquire the resources necessary to conduct a qualitative veteran needs assessment. In addition, the MDVA is looking to expand training for all staff not only on customer service but on ancillary topics such as mental health.

The Department will also look to improve communications to customers by capitalizing on community publications, building out the MDVA website and consolidating printed materials. Finally, the MDVA is working on a logo redesign. The purpose of this redesign is to more effectively message to customers MDVA as a State Government Department and what services we offer as an organization.

Detailed FY17 Results and FY18 Plans

Customer Service Survey Results

Between January 9, 2017 and June 25, 2017, MDVA received 61 external responses and 1 internal response to the customer service survey. Seventy-four percent of respondents indicated they were ‘very satisfied’ with their experience.

Twenty-three respondents provided personal information and were contacted individually by phone or email. The overriding majority of respondents who indicated dissatisfaction were unhappy with respect to their experience with the USVA. MDVA will work to improve messaging to clarify our Department as a State agency yet continue to resolve any complaints, regardless of subject matter, shared by customers.

Customer Service Satisfaction Survey Results								
	Question 1: Overall, how satisfied are you with the customer service provided?							
MDVA	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	External Total	Internal Total*	Grand Total
1/9/17 - 1/15/17	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
1/16/17 - 1/22/17	1	0	0	0	1	2	1	3
1/23/17 - 1/29/17	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
1/30/17 - 2/5/17	2	1	0	1	1	5	0	5
2/6/17 - 2/12/17	5	0	0	0	0	5	0	5
2/13/17 - 2/19/17	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
2/20/17 - 2/26/17	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
2/27/17 - 3/5/17	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
3/6/17 - 3/12/17	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	2
3/13/17 - 3/19/17	2	0	0	0	4	6	0	6
3/20/17 - 3/26/17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3/27/17 - 4/2/17	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
4/3/17 - 4/9/17	4	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
4/10/17 - 4/16/17	2	0	1	1	0	4	0	4
4/17/17 - 4/23/17	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
4/24/17 - 4/30/17	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
5/1/17 - 5/7/17	3	0	0	1	0	4	0	4
5/8/17 - 5/14/17	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
5/15/17 - 5/21/17	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
5/22/17 - 5/28/17	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
5/29/17 - 6/4/17	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
6/5/17 - 6/11/17	2	0	0	0	1	3	0	3
6/12/17 - 6/18/17	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
6/19/17 - 6/25/17	2	0	0	1	0	3	0	3

Overall Satisfaction Results: Total Responses 61		
Very Satisfied	45	74% of respondents
Somewhat Satisfied	2	3% of respondents
Neutral	1	2% of respondents
Somewhat Dissatisfied	6	10% of respondents
Very Dissatisfied	7	11% of respondents

Status of Customer Service Training

As of August 1, 2017 97% of MDVA staff had completed customer service training in person or via the HUB system. Due to turnover as well as extended medical leave some personnel did not complete the training by this deadline. However, as personnel return from leave and new employees begin their service to MDVA, training will be scheduled. In FY18, training not only in the area of customer service but also mental health and resources will be scheduled.

With the 2017 implementation of the Veterans Services Specialist Program in State Government, also managed by the MDVA Outreach Program, staff across all Departments will receive quarterly training on veteran benefits in Maryland. The goal of this program is to improve agency collaborations, hence improving customer service to veterans who work in State Government and our veteran community as a whole.

Customer Inquiry Response Times and Overall Time-to-Resolution

Timeliness of Responding to Customer Inquiries

Between January 9, 2017 and June 25, 2017, MDVA received 62 external responses to the timely and responsive customer service question.

Question 2b: Please rate our customer service on the following attributes: Timely and Responsive								
MDVA	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	External Total	Internal Total*	Grand Total
1/9/17 - 1/15/17	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
1/16/17 - 1/22/17	1	0	0	0	1	2	1	3
1/23/17 - 1/29/17	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
1/30/17 - 2/5/17	2	1	0	0	2	5	0	5
2/6/17 - 2/12/17	5	0	0	0	0	5	0	5
2/13/17 - 2/19/17	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
2/20/17 - 2/26/17	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
2/27/17 - 3/5/17	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	2
3/6/17 - 3/12/17	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	2
3/13/17 - 3/19/17	2	0	0	0	4	6	0	6
3/20/17 - 3/26/17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3/27/17 - 4/2/17	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
4/3/17 - 4/9/17	4	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
4/10/17 - 4/16/17	2	1	0	0	1	4	0	4
4/17/17 - 4/23/17	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
4/24/17 - 4/30/17	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
5/1/17 - 5/7/17	3	0	0	1	0	4	0	4
5/8/17 - 5/14/17	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
5/15/17 - 5/21/17	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	2
5/22/17 - 5/28/17	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
5/29/17 - 6/4/17	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
6/5/17 - 6/11/17	2	0	0	1	0	3	0	3
6/12/17 - 6/18/17	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
6/19/17 - 6/25/17	2	0	1	0	0	3	0	3

Timely and Responsive Satisfaction Results: Total Responses 62		
Very Satisfied	45	73% of respondents
Somewhat Satisfied	4	6% of respondents
Neutral	2	3% of respondents
Somewhat Dissatisfied	2	13% of respondents
Very Dissatisfied	9	15% of respondents

MDVA will continue in its diligence to provide timely and responsive service. However, the Department, despite improved outreach and education, continues to be confused with the USVA. For example, one response related to dissatisfaction in responsiveness was specific to the Mental Health Clinic at the Baltimore VA Medical Center. With this said, regardless of the source of frustration, MDVA intervenes to connect respondents to appropriate personnel who can assist. In contrast to a report of dissatisfaction, one respondent indicated very clearly their satisfaction, stating “(MDVA employee) was very responsive and professional.”

MDVA is making efforts to clarify the differentiation between the State and Federal VA. One example of this outreach and education effort was the banner transition from the US Flag to the Maryland Flag on the MDVA website.

Best Practices

The MDVA Benefits and Services Program now has secretarial staff in its busiest offices. This allows for an immediate phone response when a service officer is in the field. In addition, the Office of the Secretary now has support staff assisting with phone coverage. This addition has also improved customer service response times.

Upon receipt of a survey which indicates MDVA dissatisfaction, the liaison contacts the associated program director to seek immediate resolution. Open lines of communication between program directors has helped to quickly and efficiently resolve expressed dissatisfaction.

Plans for Improvement

MDVA will continue in its diligence to assist veterans, family members, and all internal as well as external stakeholders. The MDVA customer service liaison is currently developing a FAQ post for the MDVA website.

Improving the Customer Experience from Multiple Perspectives

Making Agency Services Available Online

MDVA Outreach manages website content, bi-weekly electronic newsletter, currently delivered by Constant Contact, and social media presence (Facebook and Twitter). MDVA is currently migrating email communications to the eGov Services System. The migration will enable MDVA to collect demographic data on registrants and to encourage citizens to enroll to receive our newsletter when accessing other State Government websites. Demographic data will help MDVA determine who is signing up to receive emails and inform outreach to populations identified as underserved.

MDVA does not currently process online transactions from its website. However, Charlotte Hall Veterans Home maintains a donation button on its website, www.charhall.org. This button allows individuals to make donations in support of the veterans living there.

Plans are underway to complete the MDVA FAQ website post and consolidate the most frequently asked questions. The questions will be based on Google Analytics as well as staff input.

Adjusting Hours to Meet Customer Demands

MDVA continues to work regular business hours, evenings and weekends. The MDVA Secretary and Deputy Secretary frequently attend evening and weekend events. The MDVA Cemetery Program is a 365-day operation. The Cemetery Program recently hired weekend contractual staff in order to reduce the load placed on full time personnel. The addition of these contractual employees has alleviated stress and improved service from an internal customer perspective.

In addition, Charlotte Hall Veterans Home is a 24 hour/365-day operation. The MDVA outreach program frequently attends evening and weekend events. With most staff working every Memorial and Veterans Day. With the utilization of email and social media, MDVA staff have the ability to respond to the needs of customers at virtually all hours. The MDVA website also has a contact us button which allows customers to email mdveteransinfo@maryland.gov 24/7.

Social Media Usage to Improve the Customer Experience

MDVA Outreach manages both a Facebook and Twitter account. Posts are scheduled and shared on a regular basis. Every other week, when the electronic newsletter is published, Facebook is updated to reflect upcoming events shared via the newsletter. A goal for FY18 is to use video to educate customers on veteran benefits and services. These videos will be shared on social media, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, as well as on the MDVA website.

Customer Service Survey Highlights from FY17

“The help was excellent and very helpful to all my questions.”

-Response to a veterans interment in Rocky Gap Veterans Cemetery

“I think (MDVA employee) and people like him should receive recognition for...being courteous and sensitive to the needs of those who are in desperate trouble...”

-Response to receiving financial assistance

“Secretary Owings and staff are very caring and professional in their assistance to veterans.”

-Response to receiving veterans assistance

“That was the quickest response I have received from anyone in a long time. Thank you, (MDVA employee), for your help!”

-Response to a 50th Anniversary Vietnam Commemorative Pin question

BACK COVER