

House Committee on Small Business, Chairwoman Nydia M. Velázquez

The Florida Veterans Business Outreach Center is one of twenty-two Veterans Business Outreach Centers or VBOCs serving the United States. Each VBOC is assigned geographical territory, our territory is Florida. We are hosted by Gulf Coast State College in Panama City Florida, home to Tyndall Air Force Base and Naval Support Activity Panama City. We report to the North Florida SBA District Office in Jacksonville and the South Florida SBA District Office in Miami Florida. We provide business consulting services to active duty military members, veterans of all eras, and all branches of the US Military including National Guard and Reservists, US Coast Guard Members, military spouses, and widows of veterans who wish to start a business.

The Florida VBOC is the initial VBOC established following a successful proposal to Public Law 106-50, cited as the “Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999”.

Our competencies include teaching Boots to Business classes, start-up instruction, assisting first-time business owners as they transition or retire from military service, and assisting veterans and military spouses with the process of government contracting.

We are currently in the last year of our five-year program cycle before rebidding on the project for the next funding cycle.

I will share with you statistics on Boots to Business classes, numbers of consulting sessions, and the number of clients we have assisted, as well as veteran business startups, and accomplishments made by our veteran clients in winning government contracts.

Boots to Business:

There are fourteen Florida Military Installations that participate in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) with Boots to Business (B2B). The B2B classes are managed by TAP Personnel and the SBA District

Office Economic Development Specialist/Veteran's Representative who coordinate the logistics of the program for the North and South District Offices for scheduling. The B2B classes are taught at each base on a quarterly basis or more often if the number of separating or retiring military members requires it.

Since May of 2018, the FL VBOC Office has taught one-hundred-sixty-five (165) B2B classes and has instructed nine-hundred-nine (909) B2B Modules to over thirty-two hundred separating or retiring military members and spouses.

Nathan Pollock is an Army veteran who completed the Boots to Business class. His plan was to open an upscale cigar lounge with his spouse. He worked at a cigar lounge after his separation to learn best practices before relocating to New Port Richey, Florida. The VBOC office assisted Nathan with business plan research from IBISWorld, business plan revision, assistance with applying for business licenses, and eventually assisting him with finding a lender and closing on an SBA Loan to open Patriot Stogies, LLC in March 2022. Nathan proudly served our country for 20 years as an Army helicopter pilot. Nathan said, *"The VBOC was able to find me a lender who could support my business, and they quickly got me a commitment letter. Additionally, the VBOC was able to set me up with a free consultation with an attorney to discuss a zoning issue with my building's sign. I appreciate the advice and counsel I have received from the entire VBOC team with the assistance they have provided me along the way."*

Start-Up Counseling:

We have provided over thirteen thousand (13,000) counseling sessions to eleven thousand (11,000) veterans and military spouses during the current program. We assisted in the creation of four-hundred-ninety-eight (498) businesses by assisting with feasibility studies and helping to develop business plans during the program period. Veterans and military spouses with our guidance have started businesses ranging from drone-operated home inspection companies, to retail candy stores, and purchasing franchises.

Jo Kegley, a US Navy veteran reached out to the VBOC as a resource to help grow her weight-loss business. The VBOC staff guided Jo in registering her LLC, provided information to become Woman Owned Small Business (WOSB) Certified, and provided a letter of recommendation to apply for funding. Jo is the founder of Flip Flop Diet, sustainable eating with a scheduled cheating diet and weight loss maintenance plan. After separating from the military, she documented and tested the Flip Flop Diet using her proven strategies to help family and friends lose weight and now plans to offer her diet to the public.

“I am so grateful for all of the assistance and ongoing support that I receive from VBOC. The VBOC has certainly contributed to the development of the Flip Flop Diet and to my success in receiving initial seed funding to launch my business. I recommend their services to any veteran that is in business or is thinking about starting one.”

Government Contracting:

The Florida VBOC has a unique strength in assisting veterans and military spouses by being competitive in government contracting at the Federal, State, and local level as well as bidding on and winning sub-contracts to prime contractors. During the current performance period, veterans who were assisted by the Florida VBOC office have been awarded three-hundred-twenty-two (322) prime contracts totaling three-hundred and twenty-nine million -five-hundred thousand dollars (\$329,250.00.)

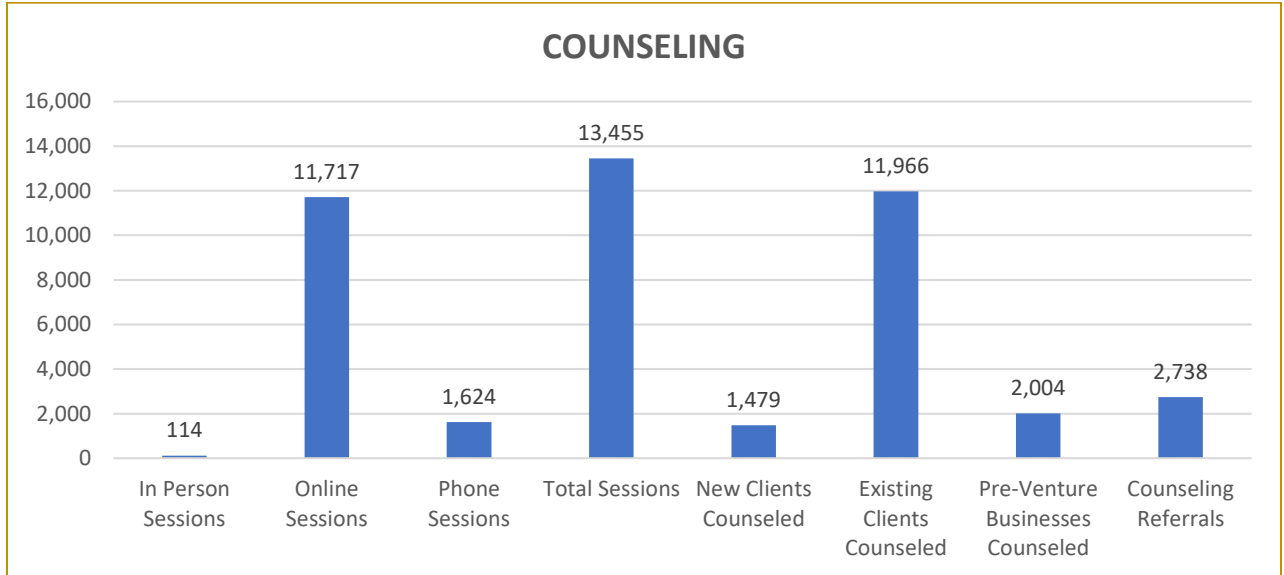
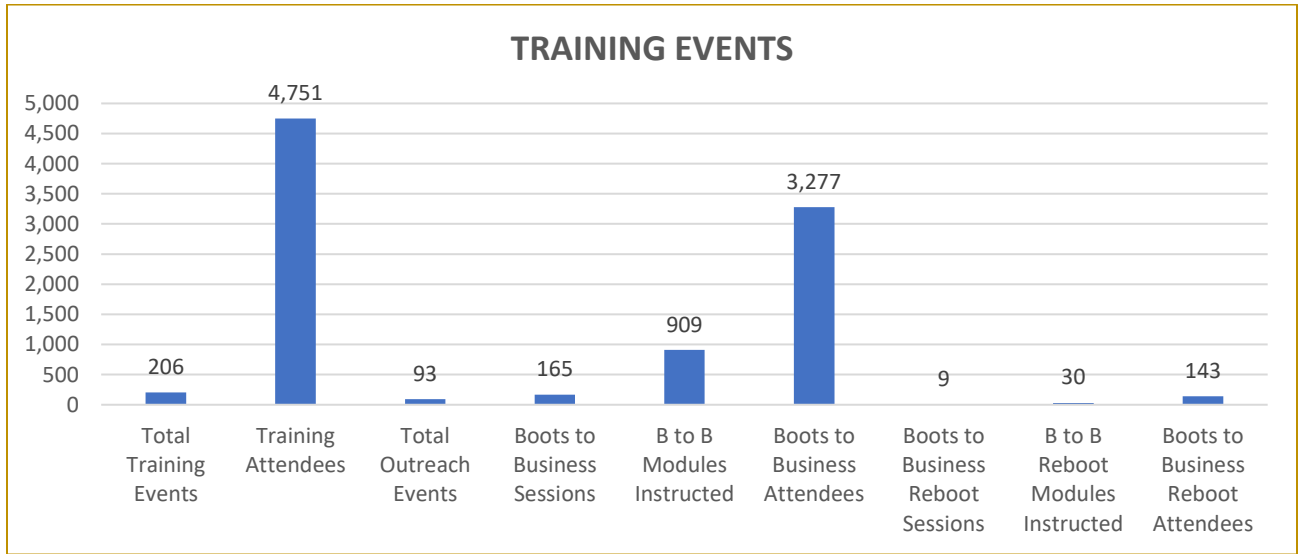
Anthony Williams is an Air Force veteran and owner of Williams Roofing in Jacksonville. The VBOC has assisted Anthony since 2013. In 2020 Williams Roofing company won one of the major USAF contracts to rebuild Tyndall Air Force Base following its destruction by Hurricane Michael in 2018. Anthony has built a strong trust bond with the VBOC team and is thankful for the assistance through the years.

The strength of every VBOC office is in its staff and professionalism the commitment to veterans and military spouses and their entrepreneurial success.

The Florida VBOC story is only one of twenty-two unique stories defined by local economies and the veterans and military spouses who reside are bound by their common desire to own and operate successful veteran-owned small businesses

References:

<https://business.defense.gov/Portals/57/Documents/Veterans%20Entrepreneurship%20and%20Small%20Business%20Development%20Act%20of%201999%20PL%20106-50.pdf>



ECONOMIC IMPACT

