

# Champion of COVID Response

Anna McBarron  
Assistant Director

## Veterans Affairs

Years of Service: 32



### Summary:

Ms. Anna McBarron masterfully lead the Chicago Regional Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs through the COVID-19 pandemic response with great aplomb. She demonstrated unparalleled excellence in leading people, leading change, building necessary coalitions, managing resources and health and safety initiatives, and achieving the highest results for Veterans and their Families.

**Description:** Ms. Anna McBarron led masterfully during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020. Facing insurmountable obstacles and the unexpected departure of the Senior Executive in Charge, she quickly took the reigns as Acting Executive Director and implemented the stations Continuity of Operations Plan, initiating Chicago's organizational response and transition to a 100% virtual posture for over 160 employees. Her efforts solidified uninterrupted service delivery to ~600,000 Veterans and their Families in 120 counties in the State of Illinois.

Understanding the criticality of maintaining an informed and engaged workforce, her quick innovation led to the most comprehensive development and deployment of critical employee engagement strategies in support of an informed and productive workforce. She designed multiple avenues for engagement using technology to host employee town halls, Special Emphasis Group activities, leadership engagement events, and key training initiatives. Additionally, Ms. McBarron worked tirelessly to open lines of communications to 100s of Veteran advocates, ensuring VA remained connected in the community to address the needs of the most at risk Veteran population.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chicago Regional Office ranked 49 in overall performance out of 56 stations across the country. Her tenacious and meticulous attention to tying each operational component of the organization together to maximize employee output, timeliness, quality, and efficiency, led to Chicago ranking the #10 producer of benefits and services for Veterans and their Families across the state. As a result, Chicago provides over \$159,000,000 monthly in Compensation and Pension benefits to over 107,000 recipients, and maintains uninterrupted service to over 1,300 participants in the Veteran Readiness and Employment Program. Her dedication to removing all obstacles employees faced during the transition and her comprehensive employee engagement strategy was central to this astonishing accomplishment.

During the pandemic, Ms. McBarron never lost sight of the importance of developing employees. She expanded the station's Learn to Lead (L2L) Program and engaged participants in her COVID-19 response actions to provide them an in-depth understanding of leadership under extenuating circumstances and great urgency. Her dedication to each employees' development through crisis resulted in the design and development of critical COVID response protocols and communications supporting a positive employee and stakeholder experience. This included a Return to Work video, written by and acted in, by each of the L2L participants. These outcomes serve as a shining example of leadership in action, an experience employees will benefit from always.

Through her executive direction and creative efforts, Ms. McBarron has forever re-imagined how benefits and services are administered through the Chicago Regional Office. Her ability to bring about new and innovative ways of providing service delivery to Veterans in a manner that honors their service, has fostered greater choice in how benefits and services are administered and easier access to services through the myriad of new offerings available as a result of her continuous push for excellence throughout the pandemic. She is to be applauded for her dynamic leadership capabilities and is most deserving of this preeminent award.