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WORK AFTER SERVICE: Developing Workforce Readiness and Veteran Talent for the Future

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About the Workforce Readiness Briefs

Upon military separation, veterans often enter the civilian workforce to either extend their career in a similar civilian role or embark on an entirely new and unrelated career path. The **Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)**, as part of its broader employment research series, and with the generous financial support and collaboration of **USAA**, is exploring the topic of workforce readiness as it relates to transitioning service members and veterans in the civilian labor force. This paper marks the first in a series of short **Workforce Readiness Briefs** that will cover several related topics such as:

- understanding how the concept of workforce readiness applies to transitioning service members and veterans;
- examining interactions between career preferences, job matching, performance, and retention;
- exploring the links between financial readiness, spouse employment, and workforce readiness; and
- employer perspectives on workforce readiness and key factors and practices that influence retention and job satisfaction among veteran employees

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WORKFORCE READINESS BRIEFS

PAPER ONE | FEBRUARY 2016





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

For decades, military recruiters have encouraged young Americans to serve as a means to get ahead in life. Many young Americans have heeded the call. Through the promise of meaningful work experience and educational opportunities, the all-volunteer force remains a national workforce readiness institution. And as service members leave the military, a natural choice and career progression is to pursue and compete for employment in the civilian job market.

For transitioning service members and veterans, workforce readiness should be viewed as an interaction between:

- what a veteran brings to the civilian workplace in knowledge, skills, and abilities,
- what employers put in place to understand, attract, and develop veteran talent in their workforce,
- and what key public and private sector stakeholders do—in partnership—to prepare veterans for civilian employment, educate employers on the nuances veteran hiring and retention, and create pathways to employment in key growth industries (see figure on next page).

While the veteran needs certain baseline skills to enter the workforce, the employer also must set the conditions to enable that veteran to succeed. Both parties play a part in the ultimate success of a hire. We argue that a tailored model of workforce readiness, with supportive public-private partnerships, will most effectively assist service members as they transition. These same efforts also support employers in securing a sustainable pipeline of veteran talent.

Workforce Readiness Recommendations

- Maximize educational benefits (including opportunities to obtain industry recognized certifications and licenses)
- Learn more about specific industries and jobs by making use of existing state and federal resources that are tailored to the military such as O-Net, industry competency models, and military occupational code (MOC) crosswalk

- DoD should identify earlier points in the military lifecycle to introduce service members to federal and state resources (e.g., O-Net, industry competency models, etc.); this requires leadership support and a cultural

change that shifts the focus of workforce readiness planning to earlier stages (and perhaps multiple stages) of the military lifecycle versus primarily during transition

- Identify experience and education gaps, and geographical considerations that may influence career decisions, but could be introduced earlier in the military lifecycle; existing federal and state resources such as O-Net and the related Competency Model Clearinghouse are robust and offer a variety of ways for veterans to explore their interests
- States should minimize barriers and streamline procedures to obtain industry certifications and licensures to enable transitioning military a more direct pathway to employment and competitive compensation

- Recognize that veterans may bring robust educational benefits that can be leveraged to fill experience or educational gaps
- Actively participate in coalitions and partnerships to build effective and sustainable veteran talent pipelines and learn about useful workplace resources and supportive practices
- Proactively train human resource professionals to understand workforce readiness issues related to veterans and transitioning service members
- Human resource professionals should strive to understand how veterans have unique circumstances that impact their workforce readiness including time and geographical constraints, cultural considerations (i.e., the work culture), and timing with their military transition

Conclusion

Veterans bring sought after soft skills to the workplace as well as applied work experience, education, licensures and credentials. However, they also may lack industry specific experience, have trouble translating their work experience into civilian terms or have trouble determining how to apply that experience to a civilian job, especially within the time constraints associated with a military transition. Employers also may not fully understand the military, which complicates the hiring process and may at times put the veteran at a competitive disadvantage. Workforce readiness is heightened when both the veteran and employer minimize assumptions and maximize their respective assets, ensuring a positive employment outcome for the veteran and a good return on investment for the employer.

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE VETERAN AND EMPLOYER

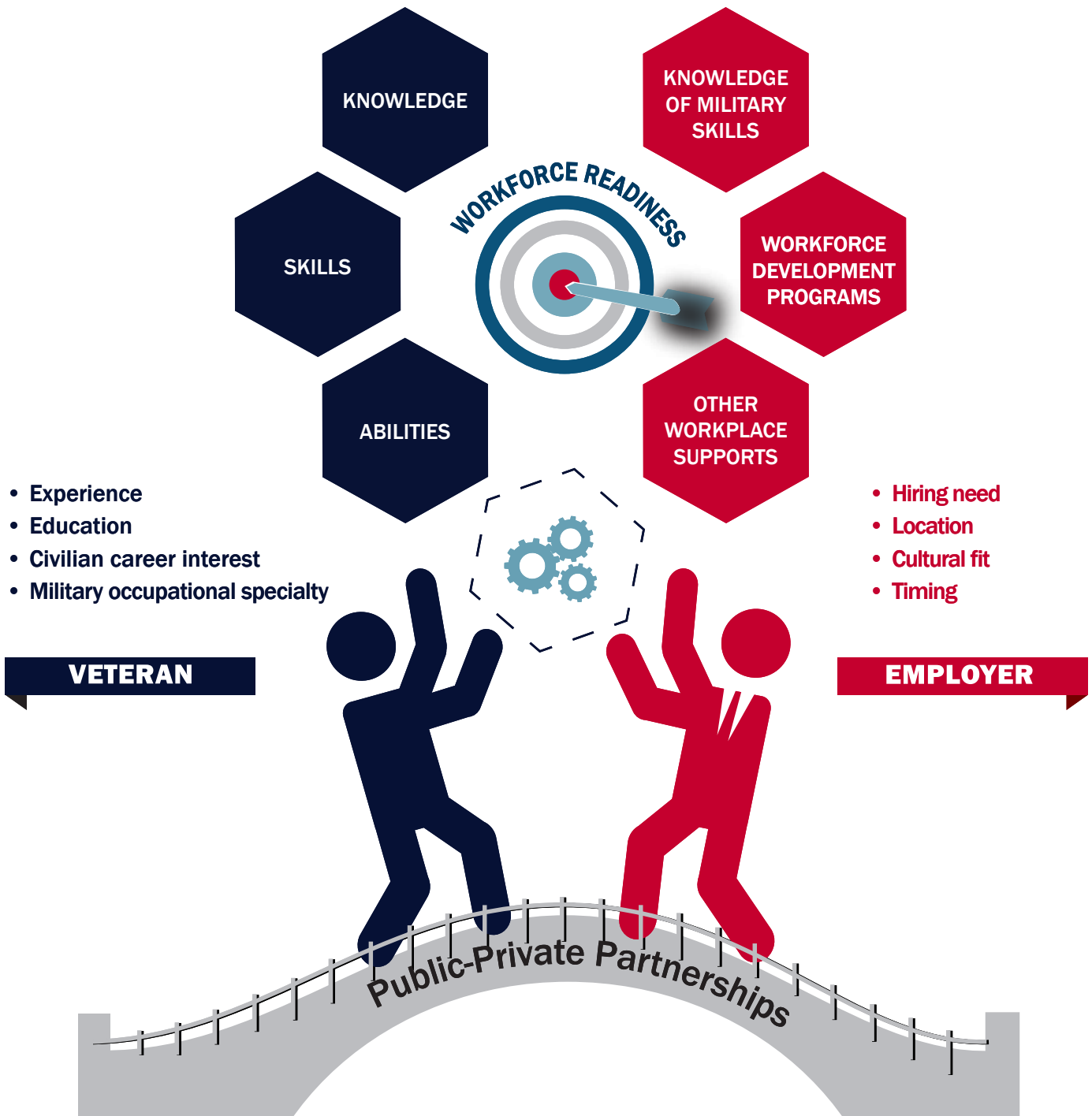


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Introduction

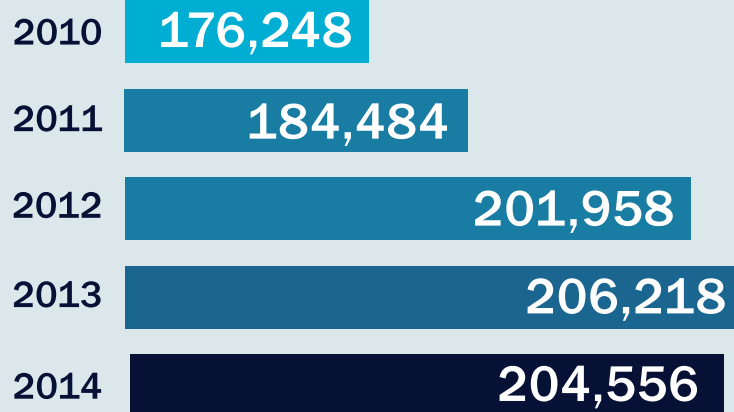
The employment situation of U.S. military veterans has improved markedly since the Great Recession's peak years. With the help of employer coalitions like the Veteran Jobs Mission (formerly 100,000 Jobs Mission), related public and private sector programs, educational benefits such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and a steadily improving economy, veteran unemployment has hit a seven-year low. Simultaneously, the military drawdown continues. Taken together, the DoD and VA estimates that roughly 200,000 service members are transitioning from the military each year and roughly one million have transitioned over the past five years.¹ Upon military separation, most veterans enter the civilian workforce and as many as half or more pursue a career unrelated to their military specialty. Stakeholders such as the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs, state and local governments as well as employers have an increased focus and arguably an increased responsibility to provide relevant and timely workforce readiness support across the entire military service lifecycle from initial recruitment to transition from service.

The promise of educational benefits and on-the-job training have long been hallmark military recruiting tools that minimize the opportunity-cost associated with military service. Education, licensure, and credentialing—all components of workforce readiness—are ways to professionalize the force and better prepare service members to perform their duties. In an all-volunteer force, individuals are more likely to serve if they are able to seamlessly obtain employment after service or, while serving, they are able to obtain civilian recognized credentials, licenses, or educational benefits that may be financially inaccessible otherwise.



ACTIVE DUTY SERVICE MEMBER SEPARATIONS

Past 5 Years
973,464
total separations



Source: Department of Defense, 2010-2014 Demographic Profile of the Military Community



To the extent that military certifications apply to civilian work, military service prepares the service member for civilian employment after service. Likewise, during transition, service members with credentials recognized by civilian employers are better able to parlay their military training and experience into gainful employment. While workforce readiness investments such as education, training, and credentialing have costs, they also prepare service members for both military and civilian occupations. And given the high number of transitioning service members and recent changes to the military benefit structure, such investments would not only benefit the individual service member, but also decrease the eventual costs to states which ultimately provide local and regional workforce training, distribute unemployment compensation, and, in some cases, administer public health care once a service member becomes a veteran.

With the support of USAA, the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) is exploring the topic of workforce readiness as it relates to transitioning service members and veterans in the civilian labor force. This paper marks the first in a series of short papers that will cover several workforce readiness related topics such as:

- understanding how the concept of workforce readiness applies to transitioning service members and veterans;

- examining interactions between career preferences, job matching, performance, and retention;
- exploring the links between financial readiness, spouse employment, and workforce readiness; and
- employer perspectives on workforce readiness and key factors and practices that influence retention and job satisfaction among veteran employees

We argue that, for transitioning service members and veterans, workforce readiness is an interaction between what the veteran brings to the workplace in knowledge, skills, and experience and the employer's qualification, time-based, and geographic needs. This relationship is supported and enhanced through intentional, proactive, and coordinated relationships across local, state, federal, and corporate partners who work in collaboration to support the workforce readiness needs of veterans. The paper highlights limitations with the existing view of workforce readiness for the general population and advances a framework to consider workforce readiness for transitioning service members and veterans. The paper also suggests how employers and interested stakeholders can leverage their respective employment readiness resources towards hiring military job candidates who are prepared to succeed once they are hired.

FUTURE WORKFORCE READINESS BRIEFS



FINANCIAL READINESS

Financial Readiness

This workforce readiness brief will explore the financial implications of military separation and retirement, and financial implications of job changes for both individual veterans and employers (e.g., what are the hard and soft costs of job changes/poor retention). Some topics will include:

- What does financial readiness mean?
- What are the opportunity costs of military service and military separation and retirement?
- How key stakeholders (e.g., government and employers) can assist veterans in their financial readiness.



Figure 1. Workforce Readiness Functions

WORKFORCE READINESS FUNCTIONS BY SECTOR		
COMMUNITIES AND STATES	FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	CORPORATE/INDUSTRY
<p>Identify local resources</p> <p>Establish state specific licensure requirements and regulations</p> <p>Catalogue local resources and job opportunities</p> <p>Identify veteran friendly employers and connect job seekers with employers</p> <p>Establish regular communication across points of contacts and key community-based points of contact</p> <p>Provide “high-touch” tailored services</p> <p>Administer benefits to constituents</p> <p>Provide local access to education, licensure, and certifications based on legal requirements</p>	<p>Disseminate information to localities and states</p> <p>Provide continuity between active duty status and veteran status</p> <p>Connect veterans and service members with local resources</p> <p>Share supply and demand characteristics of the labor market</p> <p>Provide infrastructure and common language for localities to use</p> <p>Minimize barriers to sharing resources and enabling strategic partnership</p> <p>Serve as convener to share information, data, and resources</p> <p>Provide monetary support for select state-based programming</p>	<p>Develop a business case for hiring veterans that is shared internally and externally</p> <p>Provide military cultural competence training to sources, recruiters, and hiring managers</p> <p>Utilize monetary resources, in-kind resources, and intellectual capital to support relevant partner programming and services.</p> <p>Utilize and develop shared competency models that represent industry collaboration</p> <p>Develop high touch models to improve veteran recruitment, hiring, and retention</p> <p>Minimize barriers to sharing resources and enabling strategic partnership</p>

Workforce Readiness: An Overview

Workforce readiness is a term used generically to describe a constellation of skills, experiences, and education that prepare an individual to enter the civilian workforce. For the military, the goal of achieving workforce readiness forms the basis of key programs and services for service members both before and after they leave active duty. That is, these programs are directed toward successfully preparing transitioning service members with the baseline skills and information needed to seek civilian employment (e.g., the newly revised Transition Goals, Plans, Succeed (GPS) program required for all transitioning service members).² While Transition GPS provides workplace readiness training at the time of military transition, a number of efforts are imbued throughout the military lifecycle including the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, Tuition Assistance Programs, and financial and infrastructure support for obtaining military and civilian licenses.

Workforce readiness responsibilities are not just the purview of the federal government. Rather, they are shared across a number of stakeholders who, ideally, work together collaboratively both within their own sector (vertically) and across sectors (horizontally). These various stakeholders include state and community resources, the federal government, corporations and industry, and the job seekers themselves (in this case veterans). Figure 1 shows some of the functions of each sector with regard to veteran workforce readiness.³

Defining Workforce Readiness

Currently there is no standard, widely applicable, set of characteristics that comprise the term workforce readiness. Defining the very concept is a challenge because career readiness is often specific to an individual job applicant and the extent to which that applicant matches particular job requirements. A singular definition cannot fully capture applicants' diverse experiences or employers' diverse needs across industries or occupations. While the specific standards needed to succeed in the workplace are not necessarily well understood, a "work-ready" individual must possess the "foundational skills needed to be minimally qualified for a specific occupation as determined through a job analysis or occupational profile."⁴ In addition, since the job market changes over time due to technology, innovation, the marketplace, and associated labor needs, workforce readiness remains a perpetually evolving goal.⁵

As applied to the general population, workforce readiness implies a focus on baseline individual skills needed to enter the workforce. Consequently, most conventional programs

and services may be most appropriate for less experienced persons. That is, job seekers with more experience and training may need different resources and services compared to their less-experienced peers. This distinction is significant for transitioning military of which as many as 27 percent leave military service as retirees with 20 or more years of experience.⁶

While workforce readiness has no specific, agreed upon definition, myriad public and private sector stakeholders have an interest in defining what it means.⁷ Professional and trade organizations, state workforce development organizations, educators, and researchers all have developed varying definitions of the concept of workforce readiness. These groups also have an interest to maintain a consistent talent pipeline of trained, work-ready employees from entry- to executive-level positions. Yet, while workforce readiness may vary in meaning across these groups and organizations, some shared similarities exist. For example, workplace readiness often has been defined through skill clusters such as interpersonal skills, professional skills, and job-specific technical skills that describe the minimal abilities a person would need to enter an industry or occupation. Another similarity pertains to preparing for the labor force of the future (i.e., knowing of and preparing for future in-demand jobs).

Other common definitions of workforce readiness include:

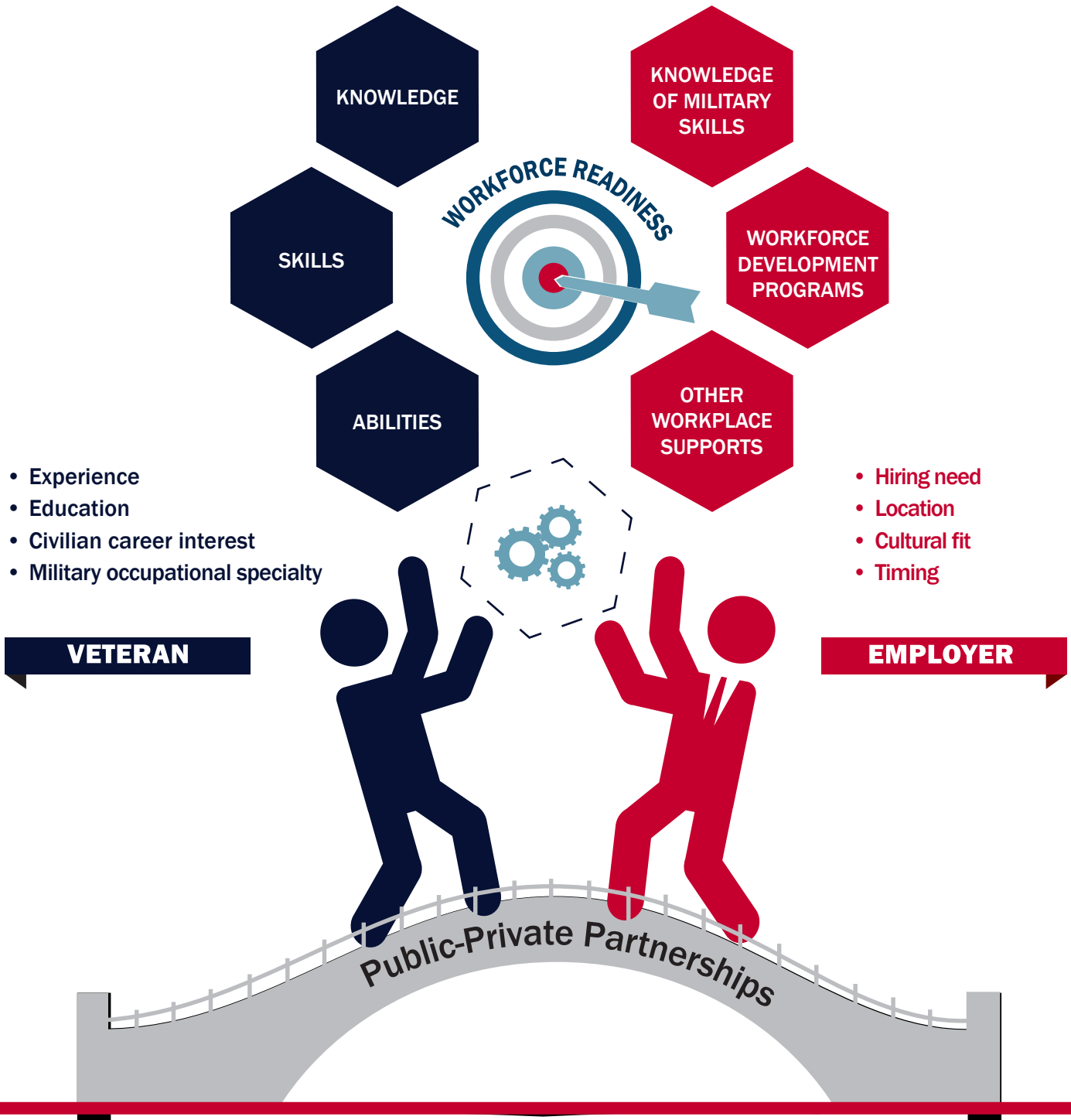
- having the ability to apply knowledge through higher order skills to demonstrate success in college and careers
- being prepared to succeed in credit-bearing postsecondary education or industry certification programs without the need for remediation
- having core foundational knowledge or skills necessary to succeed in workforce training, certification, entry-level or college course that would lead to self-sustaining wages, foundational skills (including reading, writing, communications, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem solving)

Trade organizations with local and state-based chapters, such as the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), have been actively involved in providing workforce readiness resources targeting veteran employment in local communities. For this initiative, we start from the SHRM definition of workforce readiness, which includes two qualities:

- First, is ensuring new and returning job candidates are prepared to enter the workforce with the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities required to succeed in the workplace.
- Second, is that workplaces are supportive in welcoming the new workforce.⁸

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE VETERAN AND EMPLOYER

Figure 2: Workforce Readiness Model



The definition is a helpful starting point to consider the transitioning military population. It aligns closely with transition programming led by the Department of Defense's (DoD), in partnership with the Departments of Labor (DOL), Education (DOE), and Veterans Affairs (VA), Small Business Administration (SBA), and Office of Personnel Management (OPM), among others. Furthermore, under this view, partnerships and alliances between educational institutions, governmental entities, nonprofits, and employers are key to ensuring that new workforce entrants are prepared for the challenges and opportunities they will encounter within the workplace. After talking with many employers about their veteran hiring practices, data suggest that established strategic partnerships (community-based, regional, and federal) facilitate more effective hiring.

Applying the Concept of Workforce Readiness to Transitioning Service Members

The SHRM definition of workforce readiness mentioned above focuses on two items: (1) the job candidate's knowledge, skills, and abilities and (2) workplace supports. This view of workforce readiness works particularly well for entry-level job candidates with little job experience. It is also sufficient for non-military career shifters looking to re-tool themselves for new opportunities. For transitioning military, however, the traditional view of workforce readiness falls short. This is because employers are much more likely to have a common frame of reference and understanding of other civilian industries and occupations than they are of the military.

Accordingly, we contend that, in the context of transitioning service members and veterans, workforce readiness should be viewed as an interaction between:

- what the veterans bring to civilian workplace,
- what employers put in place to understand, attract, and develop veteran talent in their workforce,
- and what key public and private sector stakeholders do—in partnership—to prepare veterans for civilian employment, educate employers on the nuances veteran hiring and retention, and create better pathways to employment in key growth industries.

Figure 2 depicts this general interaction between the veteran, the employer, and workforce readiness gaps.

SERVICE DEVELOPED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES

Upon entering military service, service members, as a group, are arguably more workforce ready than many of their nonveteran peers due to the military's basic entrance standards for education, morals and ethics, and physical and mental health. On average, veterans are more educated than their civilian peers, with as many as 30 percent having a high



school education and 65 percent with some college education or higher.⁹ Many transitioning veterans, regardless of rank or service, have significant work experience leading teams, supervising and developing subordinates, planning and implementing projects and operations, and communicating to diverse audiences. They also bring with them hands-on experience, technical training, and in some cases licenses and certifications that prepare them for the corresponding civilian certification.

"Soft skills" are considered, in some situations, even more important for workplace success than specific technical skills. These include professionalism, teamwork, interpersonal and emotional intelligence (e.g., "people skills"), critical thinking, and the ability to solve problems, many of which are the precise skills developed as a result of military service.¹⁰ For example, training and advising foreign militaries—major undertakings in both Iraq and Afghanistan—is a difficult role that does not correspond to a specific occupational specialty (outside of special operations forces), but demands effective application of people skills, relationship building, influence and persuasion, and the cross-cultural transfer of knowledge and skills.¹¹ When 400 employers across the U.S. were surveyed and asked which skills new job market entrants needed for success in the workplace, the most important skills cited by employers included: professionalism/work ethic, oral and written communication, teamwork/collaboration, and critical thinking/problem solving. These soft skills were deemed more important by employers than more foundational skills such as reading comprehension and mathematics.¹²

FEDERAL WORKFORCE READINESS RESOURCES

The Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) Act of 2011 requires that 100 percent of eligible separating service members receive updated transition assistance services. This service entitled Transition GPS includes information about job-seeking tools, military skills translation, educational opportunities, and use of benefits such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill. Additional elements include information about entrepreneurship, credentialing opportunities, and financial readiness. Related efforts to improve workforce readiness have included increased reciprocity of licensure for high demand occupational areas (e.g., aircraft mechanics, automotive mechanics, emergency medical technicians, and licensed practical nurses).¹³ There is an existing network of workforce readiness assets directed toward the military already in place which range from services, to legal remedies, policies, as well as funding support in the form of tax incentives, and grant funding. Some of those efforts are listed below.

Department of Defense (DoD):

- ★ **Transition GPS**, The DoD's updated five day workshop focused on transition from military service to civilian life, includes information about job-seeking tools, military skills translation, educational opportunities, use of benefits such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and information about entrepreneurship, credentialing opportunities, and financial readiness.
- ★ **SkillBridge**: Service members meeting certain qualifications can participate in civilian job and employment training, including apprenticeships and internships. Training can take place starting up to six months prior to a service member's separation, and must offer a high probability of employment and be provided to the service member at little or no cost.

The Department of Labor (DOL):

- ★ **O-Net**: Occupational codes in O-Net can be used to conduct a military-occupational code (MOC) crosswalk based on jobs filled while serving in the military. The crosswalk is intended to identify civilian jobs that correspond to various military roles as well as occupational outlook, necessary education, licensures, credentials, and salary information.
- ★ **My Next Move for Veterans** is an O-Net based search engine, intended to help users link prior military experience (branch of service and military occupation code or title) to pertinent information needed to explore civilian careers and related training, including information to write resumes that highlight relevant civilian skills.
- ★ **The Gold Card Initiative** is a joint effort of the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) and the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS). Provides unemployed post-9/11 era veterans with intensive needed to succeed in today's job market.

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):

- ★ **Montgomery and Post-9/11 GI Bill** Provide funds for educational costs (and some living expenses) for eligible veterans and for eligible spouses and family members.
- ★ **VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E)** services includes their Education and Career Counseling Program which allows service members and veterans to get personalized counseling and support to help guide their career paths and encourage the most effective use of their VA benefits and assistance with job training, employment accommodations, resume development, and job seeking skills coaching. Other services may be provided to assist Veterans in starting their own businesses or independent living services for those who are severely disabled and unable to work in traditional employment.
- ★ **Veteran Employment Centers (VEC)** provide critical paths to employment through their workforce development programs and services connected at the state level through American Job Centers and online through vet.gov. VEC provides a one year job seeker account to LinkedIn and access to 800 free Coursera online courses as well as an online location for job seekers and employers to connect.

Small Business Administration (SBA):

- ★ Offers a variety of resources to veteran's interested in small business ownership and entrepreneurship including information about financing for Veteran-Owned Businesses, loan and grant information including states and organizations who provide loans to veterans, access to training, counseling and assistance, business resources for people with disabilities including service-disabled veterans. SBA offers **Small Business Development Centers (SBDC)** with 18 regional affiliated Veteran Business Outreach Centers (VBOC) offering targeted services to veterans including business plan development and mentoring.

PREPARING THE WORKPLACE

With less than one percent of the U.S. population serving today, increasingly fewer employers have a sufficient depth of understanding of the nature of various military occupations and their associated skills and responsibilities. This is problematic for two reasons. First, while a veteran must be able to translate his or her skills to a potential employer, an employer's lack of a common reference point puts the veteran at a disadvantage. Education and other hiring factors aside, the veteran would be subject to the employer's assumptions about and past experience with veteran employees (good or bad). Second, for the potential employer, not having a depth of understanding of military occupations hampers their ability to make an informed hiring decision and potentially place or utilize the veteran to his or her first, best use within the organization.

In addition, employers typically have specific hiring needs driven by factors such as minimum education level, industry-specific experience, timing, and location, among others. Naturally, if an employer's hiring needs are closely aligned with a transitioning service member's prior military skills and experience there is little cause for concern. However, not all military jobs have a direct civilian counterpart. Moreover, many veterans (about 55 percent in a recent IVMF survey) pursue careers different from those they held in the military and some leave the service still unclear as to the type of career they would like to pursue.¹⁵

Fortunately, transitioning service members have access to the generous Post-9/11 GI Bill. This aids workforce readiness tremendously since a college degree provides a critical and

common reference point for all employers. Secondly, in some cases college education allows veterans to access an alternative network of civilian mentors and peers, including classmates, professors, and university-based career services where exposure to resources, people, and job search tools may differ from those confined to military settings. Finally, many veterans are using or plan to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit (if not transfer it to their dependents), but as the latest evidence suggests, the typical transitioning service member is older, married, and needs to continue to work while continuing their education.^{6,16} For employers, the implication is that transitioning service members, in large part, are entering the workforce armed with robust educational benefits that could be leveraged to enable hiring, advancing, or retaining veteran talent.

Creating flexible pathways (e.g., apprenticeships) that allow transitioning service members to both work and gain invaluable industry-specific skills while finishing a bachelor's or master's degree may prove a valuable investment from a workforce development perspective. In addition to formal education, many service members have received industry recognized certifications that are compatible or similar to those in the civilian world. When states can work to minimize barriers to either recognize already completed military certifications or remove barriers to achieving the civilian equivalent, they enable the transitioning veteran to more quickly and seamlessly leverage the qualifications they already have earned while focusing their resources on other skill or certification workforce readiness gaps. At the federal level a number of efforts have focused on these certification-related issues.

FUTURE WORKFORCE READINESS BRIEFS

WORKFORCE READINESS ALIGNMENT

Previous research has found that regardless of the number of jobs service members have held post military service, there was an association between job alignment (how a veterans employment preference aligns with the work they are doing) and job tenure within the veterans' preferred career field. Future workforce readiness briefs will look at differences between those service members that align (in terms of preferred career field and other factors) and investigate whether there is a difference in:

- job retention
- job duration
- income

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES ON VETERAN WORKFORCE READINESS

Future workforce readiness briefs will explore the key factors that contribute to workforce readiness success. Key questions include but not limited to:

- Who is successfully retained and how do they differ from veteran employees who are not retained?
- Are there commonalities among those who do well during transition and those who don't and how does this correlate with military occupations specialty (MOS), etc.?
- Are there certain groups who require more or different services before, during, and after their transition?

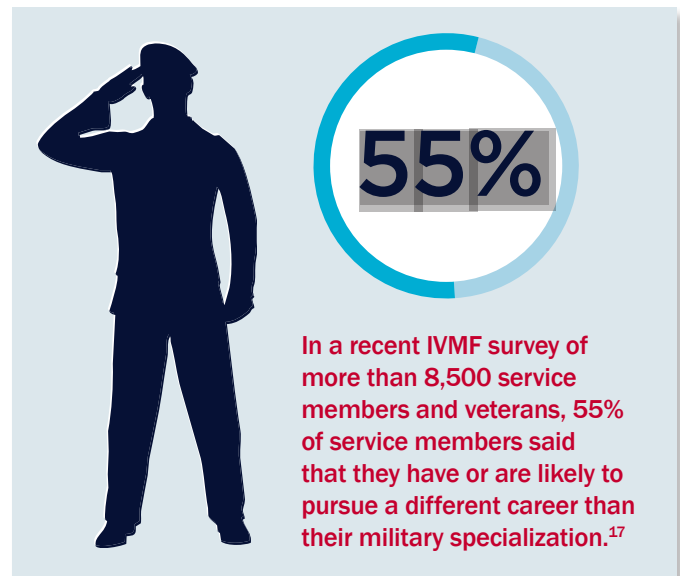
Improving Employment Outcomes

Transitioning service members exhibit diverse career aspirations and workforce readiness. As suggested above, the most direct and least difficult civilian career paths for transitioning military are in careers that align closely to specific military occupations—military police and civilian law enforcement, for example. However, for uncertain job seekers or those with new career aspirations distinct from their previous military specialty, the path to post-military employment is less clear. In fact, it is often complicated by the need to consider various options (including additional education or vocational training) in a short timeframe, often with financial pressures, family considerations, and the stress associated with multiple, simultaneous life changes. Accordingly differentiated, tailored, and more comprehensive services and programs may be needed to assist transitioning service members on their path to workforce readiness especially when the path to employment is less obvious.

Empirical evidence suggests that veterans, by virtue of their military experience as well as their personal characteristics, make exceptional employees as they bring leadership, camaraderie, teamwork and a host of relevant skills that comprise a “business case” for hiring veterans.¹⁸ Yet, while veterans may be excellent at developing teams and providing leadership, they may not immediately understand civilian workplace, corporate, or industry-specific norms critical for success. Alternatively, a veteran may be able to perform a given civilian role, but in a job interview, is either unable to effectively translate their military experience to the role, or the civilian employer mistakenly perceives a poor match due to a lack of understanding of their experience or trained skills. This example reflects a communication and knowledge issue on both parties. Even so, the employer may have clearly defined prerequisites (e.g., degree or certification) that will impede a successful match even when the translatable skills are clearly understood.

To be sure, translating and marketing military skills and experience to civilian employers is, and will remain, one of the most salient and challenging transition tasks, even for those with significant military experience. And, at the same time, civilian employers are more likely than not to have limited understanding of the military, and vary in their willingness to bring on candidates who may need additional training, or their ability or desire to immediately compensate or provide leadership opportunity comparable to the level they enjoyed in the military.

In these cases, it becomes increasingly important that both the veteran and employer are clear what types of skills are needed to fill open positions, and veterans must be clear on (1) how their experiences can be leveraged in a new setting, (2) the types of positions that match their previous level of experience and education, and (3) the types of experiences, including education, licensure, certification, mentorship, on the job training, that will fill experience or knowledge gaps. Completing these tasks just prior to military separation or retirement is a difficult task particularly for those who have limited knowledge or understanding of the civilian workforce.



Source: C. Zoli, R. Maury, & D. Fay, Missing Perspectives: Servicemembers' Transition from Service to Civilian Life — Data-Driven Research to Enact the Promise of the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Institute for Veterans & Military Families, Syracuse University, November 2015).

While it might be ideal to start planning for a career after service in advance of separation of retirement, time-constraints, work responsibilities, and the inability to predict unanticipated problems after leaving the military may complicate the ability to plan ahead.

OFFER CAREER EXPLORATION EARLIER IN THE MILITARY LIFECYCLE

For example, as part of the Transition GPS program, transitioning service members are required to conduct a gap analysis and construct a transition plan that outlines training, credentialing, education, or apprenticeship that is needed to prepare them for their intended career path based on their use of the O-Net system.¹⁹ This exercise is certainly helpful in exposing transitioning service members to a robust resource, but it also assumes, that the transitioning service member has enough self-awareness to identify their career interests at the time of military transition. In some cases, this assumption is not accurate. Veterans may not know what they want to do; some assume they must continue on the same path they were on while in the military, some are unsure what they want to do, and some may have erroneous assumptions about the careers they are prepared for. Service members who are exposed to career exploration resources early in their military careers might be better served by making long term career planning a more salient priority and empowering them to explore career information at times when it is most useful and relevant. The overall goal is to introduce career planning to the service member at times in his or her career when it can have the optimal impact. The introduction of career planning information at the transition stage rather than earlier stages of the military lifecycle may disadvantage the service member by constraining the time they have to take proactive efforts on their own behalf.

EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

Although Figure 4 is a simplification, in general, four possible scenarios relate to workforce readiness outcomes based for veterans' levels of training and experience. With regard to negative outcomes and workforce readiness, barriers to veterans' entrance into the workplace may include a lack of information about how to obtain necessary experience, credentials or education or a lack of knowledge about how their interests, knowledge, skills, or abilities translate to a career outside of the military. There may also be a mismatch in expectations about the types of jobs that align with one's military experience or training or the extent to which employers are willing to hire a candidate based on soft-skills in the absence of relevant technical training. In some cases, veterans may over- or under-estimate their experience and target their employment efforts inconsistent with their experience. Also problematic is the scenario in which skilled or highly trained and experienced service members have difficulty finding employment or finding employment that aligns with their financial goals, employment goals, or geographical requirements. For example, a recent study of veterans seeking employment assistance, indicated that some veterans expressed unrealistic expectations about the employment opportunities they were qualified for, were sometimes unprepared, and were frustrated by receiving offers for positions that they perceived to be at a level beneath their expectations.²⁰

There is some research that supports the idea that both veterans and employers having difficulty transitioning into civilian careers that offer equivalent pay, benefits, and level of responsibility to their military career.²¹ Managing expectations among service members before they transition from service can help them prepare emotionally and financially for transition.

With regard to negative outcomes and workforce readiness, barriers to veterans' entrance into the workplace may include a lack of information about how to obtain necessary experience, credentials or education or a lack of knowledge about how their interests, knowledge, skills, or abilities translate to a career outside of the military.

Likewise, employers can recognize a veteran candidate's value to the workplace by offering clear salary information, benefits, opportunities for advancement, and clear expectations for how to succeed. Some transitioning veterans may have unrealistic expectations about the salary and benefits they are likely to receive outside the military. For example, some veterans are surprised to take a pay cut when they leave the military or they find that the combined value of pay and benefits declines after service. Prior to transition, the DoD can help can help manage expectations by explaining typical career trajectories for successful employees, sharing market rate salaries, and how decreased income might be recovered over the course of a successful career. These aspects of transition, as well as the financial implications of military spouse employment will be explored as they relate to workforce readiness in more detail in a later paper in this series.

ALIGNING EXPECTATIONS BETWEEN THE EMPLOYER AND THE JOB SEEKER

Employer misperceptions that veterans are not workplace ready due to factors such as: stigmas about veterans; assumptions about understanding the civilian workplace; a lack of understanding about how military skills might transfer to the civilian workplace; and the often erroneous assumption that transitioning veterans wish to continue performing similar roles once they transition into the civilian workplace.²² Likewise, the veteran or service member may have difficulty translating their experience into civilian terms, lack confidence or insight into how their experiences can be leveraged, or have misaligned expectations about how their military experience or training will translate into civilian employment with regard to pay, position, level, or the type of position they are likely to obtain post-military service.

GETTING A BETTER RETURN ON INVESTMENT: INTEGRATED, HOLISTIC WORKFORCE READINESS TRAINING

Ensuring that new hires who are workplace-ready speaks to the need to quickly identify and hire high quality employees that bring value to an organization. Streamlining the recruitment process and being able to identify employees that match desired qualifications for open positions can be one way in which employers can decrease their costs and maximize their return on investment (ROI) when hiring veteran employees. Using veteran skill translators to help to identify military language and translating it to civilian skills sets is one way. For example, military language may be a barrier between the recruiter or hiring manager and the potential employee or job candidate. Ensuring the recruiting staff is educated and able to translate skills can help in identifying skillsets that can transfer from military to civilian employment. It also is important to remember that some veterans may seek employment opportunities that differ from their previous military roles.

Figure 3. In Demand Skills

IN DEMAND SKILLS

COMPARED TO SKILLS ENHANCED BY MILITARY SERVICE

MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS CITED BY EMPLOYERS FOR WORKPLACE SUCCESS:¹²

- Professionalism/work ethic
- Teamwork/collaboration
- Oral and written communication
- Critical thinking/problem solving
- Ethics/social responsibility

SKILLS STRENGTHENED OR ENHANCED BY MILITARY SERVICE:¹⁴

- Work ethic/discipline
- Teamwork
- Leadership and management skills
- Mental toughness
- Adaptation to different challenges
- Professionalism

Source: For employers see The Conference Board, Inc., the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Working Families, and the Society for Human Resource Management. (2006). Are They Really Ready to Work: Employer's Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of the New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce. For Service members see C. Zoli, R. Maury, & D. Fay, Missing Perspectives: Servicemembers' Transition from Service to Civilian Life – Data-Driven Research to Enact the Promise of the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Institute for Veterans & Military Families, Syracuse University, November 2015).

Figure 4 . Employment Outcomes

RANGE OF EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES BASED ON TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE LEVELS

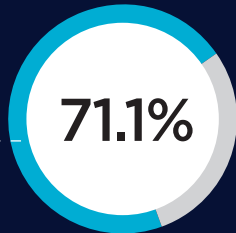
		NEGATIVE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES	POSITIVE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES
VETERAN TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underemployment • Unemployment • Delayed employment • Poor match due to geographical or financial expectations (e.g., pay and position is not commensurate with experience) • Leaves the labor force 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment with career trajectory • Employment that matches veterans' knowledge, skills, and abilities • Pay and position is commensurate with experience
	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment • Underemployment • Unclear pathway to employment • Lack of resources to meet employment goals • Unable to work (e.g., health issues, disability, caregiving) • Leaves the labor force 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entry level employment • Employment with training • Training, credentialing, or education is accessed



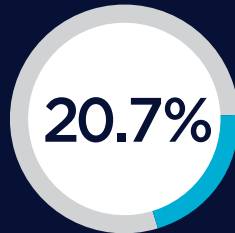
WHERE VETERANS WORK

INDUSTRY

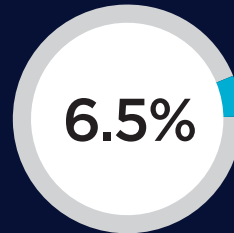
“A group of establishments that produce similar products or provide similar services. For example, all establishments that manufacture automobiles are in the same industry. A given industry, or even a particular establishment in that industry, might have employees in dozens of occupations. The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) groups similar establishments into industries. NAICS is replacing the former Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system.”



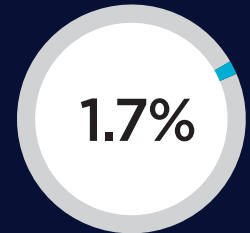
of all employed veterans
WORK IN PRIVATE,
nonagricultural industries



WORK IN GOVERNMENT
Public sector employment remains
an important channel through which
veterans engage the labor market.

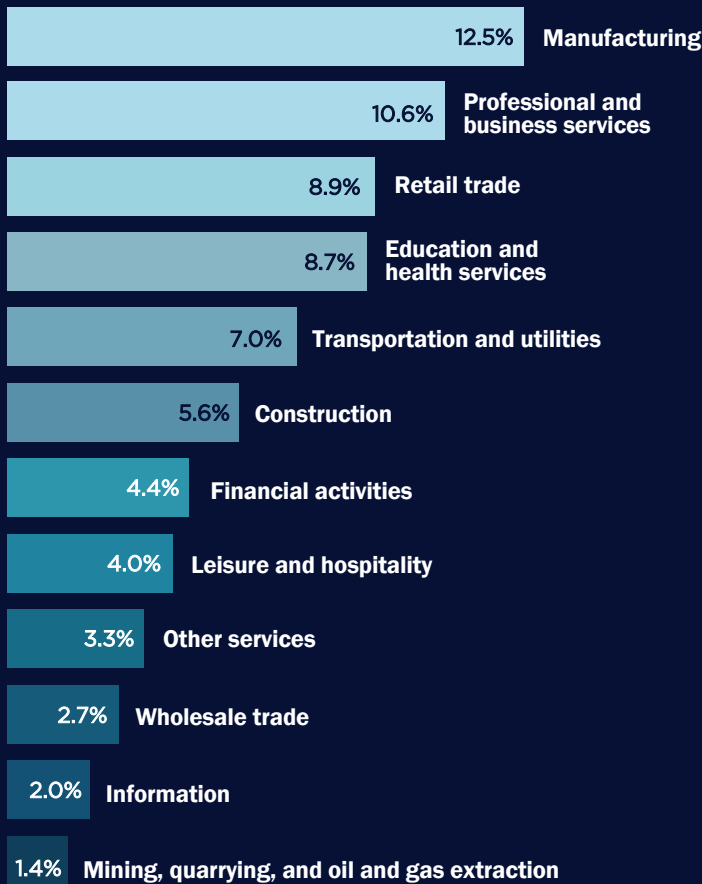


SELF-EMPLOYED
workers, unincorporated



AGRICULTURE
and related industries

71.1% PRIVATE INDUSTRY



OCCUPATIONS

“A set of activities or tasks that employees are paid to perform. Employees that perform essentially the same tasks are in the same occupation, whether or not they work in the same industry. Some occupations are concentrated in a few particular industries; other occupations are found in many industries.”



37.3%

of employed
veterans worked
in management,
professional, and
related occupations

14.1% Service occupations

17.9% Sales and office occupations

13.5% Natural resources, construction,
and maintenance occupations

17.3% Production, transportation, and
material moving occupations

VETERAN HIRING: ASSESSMENT AND COMPETENCY MODELS

Clear job descriptions and detailed task analyses are considered important human resource functions and are processes utilized to streamline sourcing, recruiting, and hiring of job candidates. With regard to veteran hiring specifically, task analyses that are aligned with specific military specialties can help those veteran applicants who are transitioning more quickly and easily identify positions that resemble their military specialties. For those transitioning into careers that are dissimilar to their military specialties, clear job descriptions and task analyses can assist veterans in identifying gaps or deficits in their skills or experiences and enable them to highlight those areas in which they are most competitive.

Competency modeling, another more detailed human resource related task, goes beyond task analysis and outlines the skills and abilities needed for an industry overall. In addition to job descriptions, competency models are accessible online for many key industries and can assist veterans in exploring areas of strength and weakness in their resumes. Competency models are industry specific descriptions developed in collaboration with the DOL. These models describe the skills, knowledge, and abilities required for growing industry sectors and are intended to help job seekers, career counselors, hiring managers, as well as human resource professionals identify training needed for a particular career path in a given industry.²³ This type of model also distinguishes between (1) threshold competencies, which are the characteristics that any jobholder needs to do that job effectively, and (2) differentiating competencies, the characteristics that superior job performers possess, but average performers lack. For transitioning veterans who are unsure about how their existing experiences might apply to a new career this hierarchical model could be extremely helpful in showing how one might progress through a given career based on experience, skills, and training. Likewise, it could also help to realistically calibrate expectations about the types of positions one is qualified for.

Competency models are visual and are presented in a tiered pyramidal format. The pyramid's base shows the foundational skills specific to an industry. Moving upwards more advanced and industry and occupationally specific skills are shown within the highest tier. Because competency models represent collective and strategic decision making from industry representatives, they can be useful to veteran job seekers who want to explore or identify the skills relevant to a given industry of interest, but lack the industry-related connections that would facilitate communication with persons working within a given industry.

Currently, there are competency models for 26 industries shown on the DOL's Career One Stop website (e.g. advanced manufacturing, financial services, entrepreneurship, and retail to name a few), and many of those correspond to industries



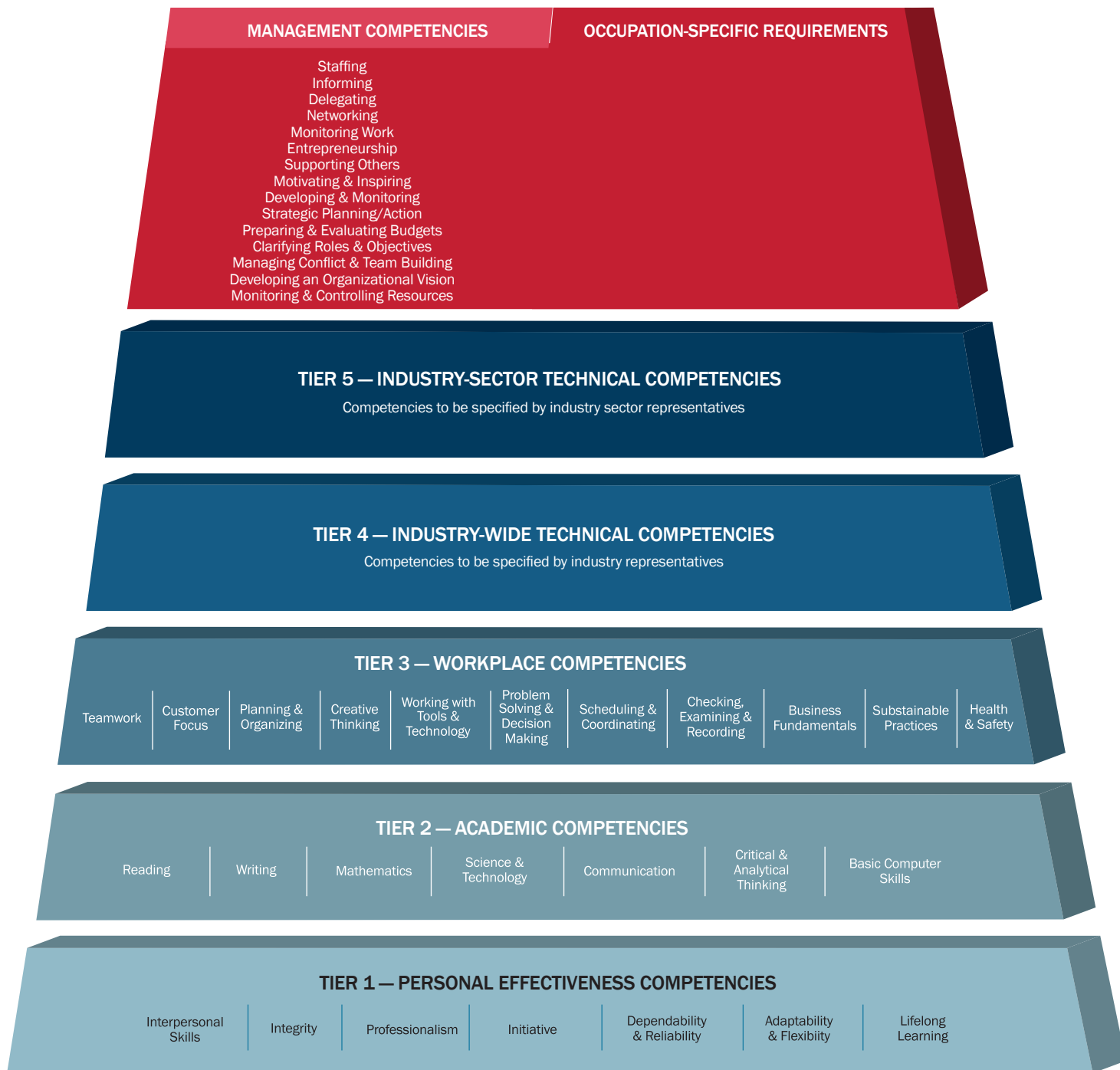
commonly chosen by transitioning veterans.²⁴ For service members who are unclear about their career interests or how to apply their military training and experience, competency models could be used to better understand various careers and industries or to identify education or credentials that may be needed. They also visually represent which soft-skills a veteran candidate could leverage on a resume, within an interview, or in a cover-letter.²⁴

Competency models can also be helpful for the employer. For example, a hiring manager can also use a competency model to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities that align with an organization's business case and can then be included in a job description, ensuring job seekers have realistic expectations about the work they will be asked to do. These competency models are linked to the O-Net system so that users can also map the tiers to needed training, particular job roles, and skills.

Currently these 26 competency models are accessible online, but are not addressed in the Transition GPS material provided during military transition. Because competency models can be used to gauge the knowledge, skills, and abilities of interviewees, hiring managers can develop questions that query a candidate about specific instances they have demonstrated the competencies needed for the job. Likewise, job candidates can more effectively prepare for interviews knowing which competencies are most important. Consistent use of competency models throughout an organization provides employers with the means to measure employee performance, and employees with clear performance expectations. Employees who do not demonstrate necessary competencies can be referred to target training or professional development activities. For veteran job candidates, new hires, and for employees hiring veterans these models could provide a common language, expectations, and means to collect metrics all of which have been noted as problematic as initiatives focused on veteran hiring have developed.

EXAMPLE COMPETENCY MODEL

Figure 5 . Example Competency Model (Career One Stop)



Source: Image adapted from Career One Stop at <http://www.careeronestop.org/CompetencyModel/>

Summary

If a key driver to military recruitment is the promise of education and employment, then a seamless transition from service for service members supports the nations' national security goal of sustaining an all-volunteer force. This goal requires a systematic and long-term focus on workforce readiness that is integrated throughout the military lifecycle, and relevant to today's workers and the supply and demand of the marketplace.

A variety of factors influence whether there is a good match between the job-seeker, and an employer; workplace readiness is highest when the goals of each are in alignment. **Appendix A** is included to assist veteran job seekers and employers in determining how they can more effectively achieve a successful match. For veterans, this means understanding the industry where they are seeking employment, maximizing their educational benefits, and demonstrating that they are a good fit for positions when they apply. On the employer side, developing military talent pipelines for critical hires, identifying pathways for success for veteran employees, managing expectations about advancement, pay, and level of responsibility, and leveraging veterans' educational benefits to fill gaps in experience or credentials are ways that employer can assist translating military.

Introducing service members to career exploration resources early in the military lifecycle provides more opportunities over time for service members to prepare for an eventual transition, making use of all the resources and benefits available to them. In the attached appendix we have outlined a set of questions for veterans and employers related to service member transition so that each can play proactive roles in improving workforce readiness for specific employees and at specific companies. We also have outline key takeaways for each below:

VETERANS

- Keep detailed records of job responsibilities and transcripts; if introduced to the O-Net system early in their military career through career development training, these resources could assist the service member in translating their experiences more effectively, targeting civilian careers that align with their knowledge, skills, and abilities
- Strongly consider utilizing their educational benefits to support both their military and civilian career goals

EMPLOYERS

- Help to shape the flow of the military talent pipeline into specific industries
- Participate in or build local, state, and regional coalitions to share veteran hiring practices, pool resources, best practices, and highlight success stories
- Disseminate and share best practices
- Proactively train human resource professionals to understand workforce readiness issues related to veterans

and transitioning service members. Human Resources Professionals should strive to understand that veterans have unique circumstances that impact their workforce readiness including time and geographical constraints, cultural considerations (i.e., the work culture), and timing with their military transition

GOVERNMENT

States:

- Provide "high touch" services at the local level to help veterans more quickly identify and tailor their unique career interests, expectations, and translate both hard and soft skills and experiences
- Minimize barriers to obtaining licenses; streamline processes where possible
- Establish social capital with veteran friendly employers and human resource professionals to connect veteran job seekers with veteran friendly employers

Federal Government:

- Prioritize workforce development efforts at the highest levels of leadership to reflect it as a national security goal
- Existing federal and state resources such as O-Net and the related Competency Model Clearinghouse are robust and offer a variety of ways for veterans to explore their interests, identify experience and education gaps, and geographical considerations that may influence career decisions, but could be introduced earlier in the military lifecycle
- Identify critical points in the military lifecycle where career exploration and information can be provided to service members

The promise and subsequent delivery of work experience and educational opportunities is a means to encourage current and prospective interest in joining the military and it also professionalizes the force. However, a fraction of service members remain in the military to receive retirement compensation, and service members are transitioning in large numbers (approximately 200,000 annually); many will continue to work in the civilian labor force after they retire or separate from service. Workforce readiness resources already exist, but service members are unlikely to fully access or use these resources when they are most needed unless they are systematically integrated, tailored, and prioritized throughout their military careers. Workforce readiness training may culminate in the transition stage, but we posit that it should not be isolated to this stage. While it is the federal governments' role to support these enhancements, they can be optimally effective with collaboration and coordination with employers, state governments, veterans, but also the employers.

Endnotes

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- ³ Cross-Agency Priority Goal: Veteran Career Readiness FY2013Q4. Status Update. Retrieved from http://archive-goals.performance.gov/sites/default/files/images/Veteran_Career_Readiness_CAP_Goal_FY2013_Quarter_4_Final_2_12_14.pdf
- ⁴ Industry Competency Models and the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate. Last accessed January 12, 2016 at <http://www.act.org/workkeys/briefs/files/CompetencyModels.pdf>
- ⁵ Work Readiness Standards and Benchmarks: The Key to Differentiating America's Workforce and Regaining Global Competitiveness. ACT. Retrieved from <https://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/Work-Readiness-Standards-and-Benchmarks.pdf>
- ⁶ 2014 Demographics DoD Profile of the Military Community (2014). Retrieved from: <http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2014-Demographics-Report.pdf>
- ⁷ This includes researchers, state governments, educators in the K-12 system as well as the secondary school and higher education systems, the federal government (e.g., the Department of Labor, Department of Education, DoD, and VA), trade associations, and, naturally, employers.
- ⁸ SHRM Research: Workforce Readiness and Skills Shortages (2015). The Society for Human Resource Management. Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/Research/FutureWorkplaceTrends/Documents/Workforce%20Readiness%20and%20Skills%20Shortages.pdf>
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- ¹⁴ C. Zoli, R. Maury, & D. Fay, Missing Perspectives: Servicemembers' Transition from Service to Civilian Life — Data-Driven Research to Enact the Promise of the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Institute for Veterans & Military Families, Syracuse University, November 2015).
- ¹⁵ Ibid
- ¹⁶ Ibid
- ¹⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁸ Business Case for Hiring a Veteran: Beyond the Cliché's. (2012). Institute for Veterans and Military Families last accessed January 12, 2016 at <http://vets.syr.edu/pdfs/The%20Business%20Case%20for%20Hiring%20a%20Veteran%203-6-12.pdf>
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- ²⁴ Ibid

APPENDIX A

The table below shows the major areas that contribute to employment match along with relevant questions specific to veterans and employers. These categories are included because there are conditions specific to both the veteran and the employer that may impact workforce readiness.

FACTORS	VETERAN	EMPLOYER
EDUCATION AND CREDENTIALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the veteran have the credentials, certifications, or education for a chosen career field? Has the veteran utilized the educational benefits to maximize their chance of obtaining desired employment? Has the veteran utilized employment services that could maximize their chance of obtaining desired employment? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the credentials and skills needed to do a particular job described clearly? I have someone available who can determine if military experience or military earned credentials can be substituted in lieu of industry-recognized credentials or degrees? Does my job description make this clear?
EXPERIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the veteran pursued assistance to translate their resume and skills? Does military experience translate into a chosen civilian career? Does the veteran wish to pursue a career that is compatible with their military experience? Has the veteran pursued on the job training, apprenticeship, internship, or mentorship opportunities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are recruiters knowledgeable of military experience and possess ability to do some level of skills translation?
ECONOMIC AVAILABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the veteran willing or able to move to locations where jobs are available or are there jobs available where the veteran lives? Has the veteran utilized geographical data available on O-Net to determine job outlook for occupations of interest? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it clear where positions are available or where flexible location is an option? Do I have a strategy for recruiting veterans or transitioning service members in military- heavy locations?
GEOGRAPHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the veteran living in a remote location after transition? Is the veteran transitioning from overseas? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it clear where positions are available? Is there a strategy for finding suitable candidates in veteran dense areas? Are partnerships in place to actively recruit veterans and prepare them for employment?
TIMING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there jobs available at the time when the veteran transitions? Are there economic conditions occurring when the veteran transitions that make employment difficult? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a mechanism in place to connect with service members prior to military separation?
HEALTH STATUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the veteran have a health condition that impacts their employment opportunities? Is the veteran or service member aware of the resources available to assist them in obtaining employment (e.g. vocational rehabilitation, state workforce development programs)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there services in place to assist veterans with health conditions or disabilities that might impact their employment? Are staff and HR trained on relevant policies related to veteran hiring? Are there services in place in the workplace that could assist veteran employees with disabilities or conditions that might impact them in the workplace (e.g., EAP)? Have relevant staff received training that would minimize bias or stereotypes that might impact or influence the hiring of a veteran or service member job candidate?
PREPARATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the service member or veteran accessed the training, services, and benefits available? Is the veteran or service member aware of the pathway to employment for their desired career path? If a career path is unclear is there a plan in place to develop a plan? Has the veteran taken the time to understand the industry, job sector of the economy? Has the veteran demonstrated their “fit” with a desired position, industry, or occupation using language that matches the job description? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there an onboarding process in place to help new veteran employees acquire skills needed to succeed in the workplace? Are there employee resources (ERG, Transition support, etc.) to assist with the transition period? Is there clear guidance as to how new veteran employees can advance or receive training to assist their advancement or skill development? Is there a clear job description/analysis that outlines the job responsibilities, requirements, salary and compensation, and training needed? How does the veteran “fit” into the organization and the business case?



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The IVMF is the first interdisciplinary national institute in higher education focused on the social, economic, education, and policy issues impacting veterans and their families post-service. Through the focus on veterans programming, research and policy, employment and employer support, and community engagement, the Institute provides in-depth analysis of the challenges facing the veteran community, captures best practices, and serves as a forum to facilitate new partnerships and strong relationships between the individuals and organizations committed to making a difference for veterans and military families.



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