

# Connecting **VETERANS** and **EMPLOYERS**

**M**ore than 2.3 million veterans have served our nation since September 11, 2001, and now represent a skilled workforce for American employers. However, the transition from uniformed service member to civilian employee includes challenges for both employers and individuals. It can be difficult for employers to locate veterans and to translate military skills to unique employer needs. Veterans are often challenged to identify, apply to, interview with, and then assimilate into a civilian company with an organizational culture that differs considerably from the military.

## EXPANDING VETERAN EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The successes and challenges companies who are proponents of veteran employment have experienced highlight areas where civilian employers and federal agencies can take steps to increase veteran opportunities in the workplace.

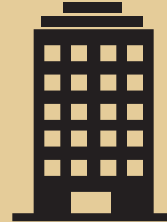
### WHAT COMPANIES CAN DO

**Educate managers on the value of veteran employees.** This is a critical challenge to successful veteran employment programs; companies must ensure that both recruiters and local managers appreciate what a veteran applicant could contribute to their workplace.

**Allocate recruitment resources strategically.** Employers with veteran hiring programs should evaluate their current recruitment activities and direct their resources to activities showing the greatest results.

**Participate in federal resources and programs, such as the Veterans Employment Center and SkillBridge,** which help address many of the veteran employment challenges that companies experience and can increase employer visibility within the veteran community.

**Establish and track relevant recruitment, performance, and retention metrics.** The assessment of such metrics can support the business case for continuing veteran hiring programs.



### WHAT FEDERAL AGENCIES CAN DO

Federal agencies have established a number of programs to facilitate and support veteran employment. Some of these efforts can be further leveraged or expanded to improve veteran employment opportunities.

**The Department of Defense (DoD) should continue to facilitate on-base access for private-sector recruiting events.** Company experiences suggest that on-base recruiting is productive, especially when combined with advance registration and prescreening.

**DoD should encourage transitioning service members to register early in the Veterans Employment Center** to engage with potential civilian employers and take advantage of the many resources available.

**DoD should consider expanding training and internship opportunities for transitioning service members.** Specifically, DoD should evaluate SkillBridge for reasonable expansions to benefit transitioning service members.



**DoD, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Veterans Affairs should continue to improve and evaluate the Transition Assistance Program.** These agencies should take full advantage of private-sector organizations willing to participate in Transition Assistance Program sessions so that transitioning service members can benefit from the expertise, perspectives and guidance of civilian employers.

# Veterans are most recognized for their leadership skills and teamwork.

Regardless of these challenges, veterans make excellent employees, so overcoming these difficulties is a worthwhile endeavor with obvious rewards for employers. RAND recently investigated veteran employment from the perspective of employers who have committed to employing veterans and learned that, while success stories abound, both industry and government can do more to expand and improve employment opportunities for America's veterans.

## Veterans Are Valued Employees

Companies in nearly every industrial sector hire veterans from all services and ranks—officers, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted personnel—dictated generally by requirements for education, skill, and salary levels, consistent with nonveteran hires. Employers appreciate that veterans bring a wide variety of job-specific skills from their military experience to the workplace: information technology, engineering, logistics, human resources, financial management, and security, for example.

Veterans are most recognized for their leadership skills and teamwork—military service prepares veterans from all military ranks to lead and to work extremely well in teams with other employees. Employers also appreciate veterans' flexibility and ability to work in a fast-paced, changing environment without undue stress; their dependability, work ethic, and commitment to getting the job done; their integrity and loyalty; and their experience working in a culturally diverse or global environment.

## Hiring Veterans

Employers use a variety of recruitment activities and vehicles to attract, select, and hire veterans, such as veteran-specific job fairs, on-base recruiting, specially trained recruiters, employee referrals, veteran-specific employment websites and pages on company websites, and general outreach to the veteran community. Among these activities, the most common practice by far is participation in military-specific job

fairs—although not all job fairs are created equal. Companies tend to experience the most productive hiring outcomes from job fairs that include advance preparation and coordination and that feature virtual technology for interviews and outreach. On-base recruiting is another effective way for employers to connect with transitioning service members.

Emerging federal government programs also help raise awareness between employers and veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Employment Center, for example, is an online registry of veterans, transitioning service members, and employment opportunities that also provides employment information and resources, including skill translators and resume-building tools. SkillBridge, a DoD-sponsored program, permits transitioning service members to participate in employment training or internships in the civilian workplace. To date, however, relatively few service members have participated in SkillBridge.

Even though veterans bring useful skills and experiences to the workplace, companies encounter some challenges in their endeavors to hire them. Some employers struggle to attract veteran job candidates and to access service members before they transition from the military to the civilian workforce. Perhaps the most significant challenge is the ability of both veterans and employers to match military skills to civilian job requirements. Even when company recruiters are trained to recognize the value of a veteran applicant, local managers who make hiring decisions do not always appreciate the merit of the veteran candidate. And the veterans themselves need a better understanding of the civilian job market and the positions for which they are qualified—particularly how they might fit into companies outside of traditional defense contractors.



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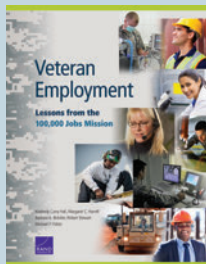
## Managing and Retaining Veteran Employees

Companies committed to veteran employment focus primarily on recruitment, directing less effort to managing or retaining veteran employees after hiring them. Companies often lack management programs geared specifically to veteran employees; rather, veterans have access to company management or career development programs available to all employees. Sometimes the lack of veteran-specific programs reflects the perception that veterans do not want to be treated differently from other employees. When employers do establish veteran-specific programs, the most common are veteran employee resource groups and veteran mentoring programs, both formal and informal.

The best programs assist veterans as they acclimate to the corporate environment. Veterans are accustomed to the military environment, in which the hierarchy and chain of command are clearly understood. As a result, some veterans

have difficulties operating in companies with less-hierarchical structures or that lack a clearly defined career path. Moreover, some veterans have difficulty adjusting to an environment with less day-to-day urgency, fewer responsibilities, and less authority than they experienced in the military.

Employers generally believe that their veteran employees perform well on the job—often better than their nonveteran employee counterparts—although employers do not tend to collect metrics about veteran performance. Similarly, company representatives assert that veteran retention is equivalent to or higher than that of nonveterans—though these views are not always based on empirical retention measures. Instead, employers base assessments of veteran performance and retention on perceptions, informal feedback, or other anecdotal data. More-detailed information about performance and retention could confirm the positive aspects of veteran employment, validate their return on investment, and provide the most compelling basis to continue hiring veterans.



This brief describes work done in RAND Labor and Population and documented in *Veteran Employment: Lessons from the 100,000 Jobs Mission*, by Kimberly Curry Hall, Margaret C. Harrell, Barbara A. Bicksler, Robert Stewart, and Michael P. Fisher, RR-836-JPMCF, 2014 (available at [www.rand.org/t/RR836](http://www.rand.org/t/RR836)). To view this brief online, visit [www.rand.org/t/RB9829](http://www.rand.org/t/RB9829). The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest.

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