

**National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)  
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Community of Practice (CoP)  
Service Delivery in Rural Areas  
Thursday, March 30, 2023, 3 – 4 p.m. ET**

**NVTAC Staff**

Sarah Chung, NVTAC Coach

Jenn Steigerwald, NVTAC Coach

**Key Points**

- **Introduction**
  - NVTAC coaches welcomed grantees to the March 2023 HVRP CoP event covering service delivery in rural areas.
  - This session highlighted challenges related to delivering services in rural areas and tips to address those challenges. The coaches opened the floor for participant feedback and encouraged participants to share their experiences providing HVRP services in rural areas.
- **Rural Challenges**
  - The challenges listed in the presentation are only some of the barriers rural HVRP providers face.
  - Transportation challenges may come in the form of clients not having their own vehicles or not living close enough to public transportation.
  - Housing and shelter availability for veterans experiencing homelessness can be more challenging in rural areas. For example, emergency shelter services or housing services, in general, may be harder to find when compared to urban areas. There may not be enough resources available to serve all those in need. Housing services may also not be easily accessible in rural areas.
  - Community silos, where communities are limited to their own spaces and lack collaboration with other communities, or individual service providers who do not partner with others in the community make it difficult for veterans to navigate within that system as they must go to each of the service providers individually to get the assistance they need.
  - Food insecurity can present problems since there may not be grocery stores nearby, which, coupled with transportation issues, would be problematic for veterans to find a way to get to a grocery store. These challenges intersect and build off each other. Veterans need access to all these services to acquire stability and obtain and maintain employment.
  - The digital divide presents a problem as most of the current job listings are found online via job boards or websites that post available positions. Without access to the internet, smartphone, or computer, this is an extreme barrier to accessing open positions, especially work-from-home jobs.
  - Access to health care may be limited. Health care facilities may not be available in rural communities. Also, veterans may not have insurance coverage.

- Childcare may be an issue for veterans with children. If there are no childcare services available nearby, veterans seeking employment will not be able to take advantage of job offers.
- There may be a lack of education in rural areas like Graduate Equivalency Degree (GED) services or institutes of higher education.
- Rural communities do not always have a variety of businesses that are actively hiring compared to urban areas. Veterans are limited to businesses that exist within or near their local communities.
- Challenges specific to HVRP service providers:
  - On-the-Job Training (OJT) is often encouraged by HVRP providers, and, without access to OJT, veterans are missing out on valuable resources that could help them get back in the workforce.
  - Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) are also a valuable resource for employment that may be limited in rural areas.
  - What is available in the job market versus the veteran's employment goals, compounded by the limited availability of hiring businesses, presents challenges to employment for veterans in rural areas. The job offerings in rural areas may not align with the employment goals of veterans. A mismatch between veteran employment goals and the job market creates a barrier to meaningful employment for veterans.
  - It is extremely important for HVRP providers to find veterans jobs with livable wages so they can support themselves. Livable wages allow veterans to become stable and get out of the cycle of homelessness. If veterans cannot afford all their expenses, from housing to childcare to health care services, they will be unable to establish a stable, independent lifestyle.
- **Discussion Question:** What are some challenges you have experienced in rural HVRP?
  - **Grantee Response:** Transportation issues are a challenge.
  - **NVTAC Response:** We hear this issue very often in technical assistance with rural community HVRP service providers.
  - **Grantee Response:** Lower wages and lack of opportunities in rural communities are a challenge.
  - **NVTAC Response:** Yes. If veterans do not have the resources they need, they do not have the opportunity or access to livable wages, and they are stuck. The HVRP provider must work with the veteran to try to solve those issues.
  - **Grantee Response:** Cell phone and Wi-Fi service access is limited.
  - **NVTAC Response:** Yes. On top of limited or no internet access, if veterans do not have a cell phone, they face an additional barrier.
  - **Grantee Response:** Communication issues or purchasing minutes for their phones.

- **NVTAC Response:** Absolutely. Their priority could be getting access to different means of communication, like internet or cell phone access, which can take up a lot of their time and may not be such a barrier to veterans in urban areas.
  - **Grantee Response:** Computer or tablet access to complete online applications and the lack of libraries are barriers.
  - **NVTAC Response:** Absolutely. As we mentioned before, the digital divide is a huge challenge for veterans in rural communities.
  - **Grantee Response:** Some veterans are not eligible for Veterans Affairs (VA) health benefits, which becomes a barrier.
  - **NVTAC Response:** Yes. If they are not eligible, that barrier is huge.
  - **Grantee Response:** They may not be eligible for other health care benefits.
  - **NVTAC Response:** Absolutely. If they are not eligible for VA and/or other health benefits, they miss out on a lot of resources.
  - **Grantee Response:** One of our biggest challenges has been a partner not referring clients for employment. Their Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) partners do not refer out to HVRP, instead they provide employment services themselves.
  - **NVTAC Response:** That is a great example of community silos that we see so often. One agency is never as impactful as multiple agencies working together. If you are trying to create a reciprocal relationship with another agency and are not getting the same effort in return, it can pose a huge barrier. Conversely, if you were receiving referrals from them, ultimately, you would be better at providing services to the veterans you serve.
- **Addressing Rural HVRP Challenges**
    - Building personal connections and rapport can help break down silos between providers and people in the community.
    - It is important to understand the local job market, especially in a small town or rural area where everyone knows each other. In big cities, it is easier to look on job boards, which do not necessarily exist in rural communities. In rural areas, people typically become aware of job openings based on who they know and the connections they have.
    - Online trainings (if applicable) and remote employment opportunities are advantageous for rural grantees.
    - Partnering with community resources is helpful.
      - This helps HVRP providers know where to find veterans in rural areas. Collaborating with partners and pooling resources leads to the best outcomes for veterans. Engaging different entities to provide wraparound services for veterans addresses barriers using a holistic approach.
      - It is important to co-enroll veterans in State Workforce Agencies (SWAs) and American Job Centers (AJCs) for training and employment services.

- Using the expertise of those with lived experience is an excellent tool because they know what the day-to-day challenges are. They may have ideas to overcome challenges and ways providers can offer services that would meet those needs.
  - When utilizing the expertise of those with lived experience, providing compensation for their valuable time is important.
- Connecting with other rural communities is important when working with communities that might not have as many resources as urban areas.
  - Leveraging your successes and all available resources amongst similarly situated providers and sharing lessons learned with other providers in rural areas, like this CoP, can help build those connections.
- Appreciating and understanding the uniqueness of HVRP service provision in rural communities versus urban environments is important. It is easy to focus on what rural communities do not have, but it is also important to focus on what they do have that would not be available in an urban environment. For example, one-on-one opportunities can seem difficult to make time for in an urban environment.
- Developing a rural taskforce can help determine what is available in the rural community that is already bringing people together to talk about best practices and challenges. It can help providers avoid duplicating their efforts. If there is no rural task force bringing people and best practices together already, it may be worth gathering one.
- **Discussion Question:** Do you have any tips from your experience with HVRP in a rural community?
  - **Grantee Response:** We have a small computer lab that supplements the library's resources, which is particularly beneficial for older veterans who are not as familiar with technology. Collaboration with SSVF and other programs include monthly meetings to serve veterans holistically, coordinating events to best help veterans considering the competitive nature of provider grants. We make sure the veterans are connected to the right resources, such as phone service. We have a Fantastic Friday event each month where veterans share stories and network with other veterans. Veterans can let other veterans know who to talk to within the system. During the pandemic, we had to get creative using virtual platforms or adhering to social distancing protocols for in-person events. We also did drive-through job fairs. When other providers start coming to events, they find it is beneficial for all types of providers to work together. We are all part of the Continuum of Care (CoC).
  - **NVTAC Response:** It seems like you are bringing folks together and eliminating silos in a successful way. You think outside of the box in such an innovative way, and we appreciate that you shared your story.
  - **Grantee Response:** Collaborate, communicate, share, network, and outreach.

- **NVTAC Response:** Constant communication and building relationships with veterans and community partners, particularly in rural areas, are key to providing good HVRP service.
- **Grantee Response:** Get others to reciprocate and show that you care.
- **NVTAC Response:** Yes, it is a give and take relationship. For example, you could ask if you can conduct outreach by setting up tables at community events and leverage resources in specific areas.
- **Grantee Response:** We started having meetups where veterans can have coffee, network, and talk about their successes and challenges. It has been a slow start, but it is picking up.
- **NVTAC Response:** Getting people together in a casual setting can be beneficial. Word of mouth is the most powerful mode of outreach. Events like this may start out slowly but build momentum.
- **Grantee Response:** We work with our clients on networking. We have a worksheet Employment Specialists can use to help veterans identify people and places with which they can network to find employment and personal connections. Local VAs, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFWs), employment offices, job developers, etc. We also help them get on Indeed and other online job portals.
- **NVTAC Response:** Networking is often an afterthought. The focus is often on applying to jobs, but networking is also important. It can come down to who you know, especially in these rural communities. Also, getting veterans to set up their resume on online job portals is a good idea.
- **Grantee Response:** Training opportunities for veterans can be found at your local Office of Entrepreneurial Development (OED).
- **Grantee Response:** They go to sites for trainings and obtain certificates upon completion.
- **Resources for Rural Communities**
  - [Information on 211](#) is a one-stop hub for health and human services that is location specific. You can access resources based on where you live and your needs.
  - [Continuum of Care: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\) Exchange](#)
    - CoCs will regularly have meetings and task forces on populations like the veteran population and bring together all the different providers under one roof to talk about challenges. CoCs also offer case conferencing meetings to connect veterans to resources they need and are eligible for.
  - [HUD Rural Information](#) provides resources to help rural communities address homelessness.
  - [National Health Care for the Homeless Council: Rural](#) hosts resources for serving people in rural areas who are experiencing homelessness.
  - [National Veterans' Training Institute](#) (NVTI) provides specialized training and professional skills enhancement for veterans' service provider's staff.

- [U.S. Department of Labor \(DOL\) Off-Base Transition Training](#) is a pilot program for veterans currently serving in the National Guard and Reserve, and their spouses to host career development workshops.
- [Local Innovative Support Corporation \(LISC\): Rural](#) identifies priorities and opportunities in rural communities and provides resources and supports.
- [Rural Public Transportation](#) provides guidance and resources from the U.S. Department of Transportation.
- [Rural Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) have produced guidance and expertise on health disparities that rural Americans face in comparison to urban communities.
- [U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\) Rural Economy](#) showcases employment trends in rural and urban communities, using data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- [USDA Rural Employment](#) houses a six-page brochure that presents indicators of employment and unemployment in rural areas.
- [USDA Broadband](#) has resources regarding technology and overcoming those barriers.
- [DOL Rural Workforce Opportunities](#) has information on Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities (WORC) Initiative funding opportunities.
- [VA Office of Rural Health](#) supports research, innovative ideas and programs, as well as new care models for rural communities.

## Conclusion

- NVTAC provided the link to a survey for providing feedback on the CoP session in the chat.
- NVTAC thanked participants for attending and sharing best practices and challenges in the rural service delivery area space.