

**National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Virtual Learning Courses (VLC)
Session 3 of 4: Employer Engagement and Post-Placement Follow-Up
May 2, 2024, 2 p.m. ET**

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Key Points

- **Introduction**
 - NVTAC reminded attendees that HVRP best practices would be shared during this session. NVTAC encouraged all grant recipients to utilize best practices that may improve their service delivery. Before implementing a practice discussed during this session, grant recipients must review their award statement of work and contact their Grant Officer Technical Representative (GOTR) to discuss if it is an allowable cost or activity or if it requires an amendment to their approved plan.
 - **NVTAC Overview:** NVTAC provides individualized technical assistance (TA), training, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and additional support to HVRP grant recipients. To contact NVTAC or request TA, reach out to contact@nvtac.org.
- **Interactive Activity**
 - **Question:** What does employer engagement mean to you?
 - **Response:** Networking and establishing relationships for meaningful employment.
- **Employer Engagement Strategies**
 - **Question:** What do you think are common misconceptions about veterans in the workplace?
 - **Response:** Mental health concerns.
 - **Response:** Some people may think that veterans are potentially unsafe to work with.
 - **Response:** Lack of reliable transportation could be an issue for employers to hire someone. Issues from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other medical issues are common misconceptions.
 - **Response:** Inability to work because of their age.
 - **Reducing misconceptions about hiring veterans**
 - Every branch is different, and veterans of one branch may have different experiences than veterans of another branch, whether they served in combat areas or not. Helping employers understand that can reduce the idea that veterans are all the same or have similar stories. There are different skill sets that each branch trains, and having a basic understanding of each service branch can help employers recognize the qualities of each veteran applicant.

- Military rank can be another indicator of a veteran’s experience and skills. Whether the individual is lower enlisted, a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO), Commissioned Officer, or Warrant Officer at the time of their discharge can provide insight into the training that they have received in leadership, the responsibilities that they held while in the service, and can help the hiring manager better understand the work ethic and experience that the veteran offers.
- One way to help the veteran understand their transferable skills is to utilize the Joint Service Transcript (JST). The JST is a record that outlines and qualifies military training, such as Basic Combat Training (BCT), Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) training, leadership development training, and more. The JST evaluates all the experience during a service member’s time in the military and equates it to college equivalency, which can help to clarify how military training translates to civilian experience. If you provide employers with an overview of the JST, they can get a snapshot of what transferable skills veterans possess and how they relate to the desired skills hiring managers seek.
- Often, employers that claim to be “veteran-friendly” hesitate to hire veterans because of the misconception that all veterans have PTSD, that all veterans are angry and unpleasant to work with, or that people enlist in the military because they could not get into college. These are all hurtful and inaccurate stigmas.
- We must help to dispel myths that PTSD is solely for individuals who have served in the military. PTSD can occur in anyone for a number of reasons, such as childhood trauma, natural disasters, intimate violence, and more. The difference is that being identified as a veteran makes it easy for employers to assume that PTSD could be present. It is not commonly asked on applications for employment if someone is a domestic abuse survivor or has survived a house fire; therefore, it is not assumed that applicants who have never served may have PTSD. Even if a veteran does have PTSD, it is important to point out that PTSD is a diagnosis with a wide variety of causes and symptoms. It does not mean that someone who has PTSD is unemployable or unable to fully function in the workplace.
- The communication style of people who have served may vary as well. In a very mission-focused environment, communication is succinct, and anything more than the communication of the mission, the steps to get the mission accomplished, and what to do when the mission is finished is unnecessary. It may take recently separated veterans time to adjust to speaking to people who have never served, but their direct and to-the-point style of communication can sometimes be mistaken as frustration, anger, displeasure, or even hostility. That is not usually the case. Helping employers recognize this communication style and empowering

them to engage positively with their veteran employees could allow the employer to feel more comfortable and help the veteran feel more welcomed into the company.

- It is essential that veterans and employers both understand the importance of the lived experience veterans have and how to talk about that in the context of transferable skills for the workforce.
 - Military service members receive extensive training in their individual MOS school and, often, cross-train in other MOSs when the mission requires adjustments to the distribution of roles. As an example, Field Artillery National Guard soldiers can be cross-trained as Military Police (MP) to perform law enforcement duties to cover the peacetime mission of the MP when they deploy.
 - Share with employers that NCOs, Commissioned Officers, and Warrant Officers have deeply engrained leadership skills and practical experience in a highly mission-focused workplace culture. To be able to advance in rank, service members must attend training that provides the skills necessary for their level of responsibility. This training prepares individuals for progressively more advanced roles within their service units and provides a framework for how to motivate subordinates, manage people, and more.
 - Additionally, military service is a rapidly changing environment in which tasks may change multiple times over the course of one day. This requires veterans to build resiliency and adaptability to ensure that all assigned tasks are completed within short deadlines. This is highly valuable for civilian employment, as veterans are accustomed to high-stress environments in which there is often little guidance.
 - Military service requires a high level of responsibility at a young age. Individuals are entrusted with the accountability and responsibility for government property, sometimes before they are even old enough to legally purchase alcohol. Individuals can be promoted to leadership positions, gaining management experience prior to non-military peers.
 - Military service often requires individuals to learn new processes and procedures quickly and train their peers on those skills. It is common for young service members to be selected to quickly become subject matter experts on new pieces of equipment with very little time before they must conduct training on it for their units.
- **Reducing misconceptions about homelessness**
 - As important as it is to change the narrative about veterans in the workplace, it is also important to challenge the stigmas around homelessness. The words “homeless veteran” can carry with them a lot of negative perceptions when viewed as a title. Instead, focus on the fact that homelessness is a temporary, situational condition that could have a wide

range of causal factors, such as financial causes outside the veteran's control, acute life events, and more. There are situations in which additional challenges, mental or physical health concerns, and individual preferences could play a factor, but helping employers understand homelessness and housing instability can empower them to want to be part of the solution for your program participants.

- **Strategies for engaging with employers**

- Finding the right job for your program's veterans is about more than just knowing what the veteran's skills, interests, preferences, and barriers are. It is also about understanding what the employer looks for in candidates, the skills they require, the employer's workplace culture, and more.
- Invite employers to visit your HVRP site to present about their companies, their open positions, pathways to employment, and the skills they seek in applicants. This also provides an opportunity for your veterans to learn about the diverse positions a company may have that they would not have expected. For example, applicants may expect a manufacturing company to have machine operator or quality control positions; however, they may also have human resources positions, office managers, transportation positions, and much more.
- Invite employers to conduct mock interviews with program participants. This can help to make them feel welcome and part of your veterans' success. Mock interviews can help expose potential applicants to questions they may encounter during real interviews, but they also help employers engage with individuals they might not have called to interview for open positions. Mock interviews can result in real job offers.
- Creating employer networks of communication can be a powerful tool. Once you have a strong, successful relationship with one or two employers, discuss with them other industries with which they have overlap. Employers know who else may be hiring and can introduce HVRP to other hiring managers, which is always stronger than cold calling.
- Empower employers that have successfully hired program participants to share success stories with peer industries or other hiring managers within their networks.
- As we build these networks and our veterans are successfully placed into employment, we can look at employment pathways and existing relationships to identify in-demand jobs and training resources to help our veterans obtain those jobs and map out the pathways for our veterans so they can better understand their next steps.
- As the employer and HVRP relationship evolves, learn what employers seek, learn about their workplace culture, and find out how you can serve them. Then foster a two-way communication channel so if you have someone who fits the mold of what the employer is looking for, you can

call them to let them know. Also, encourage the employer to proactively share their needs and what positions they are trying to fill.

- Word of mouth is very powerful, and success stories that are shared among employers can benefit your program immensely. Create teams of hiring managers who can communicate about what other employers may have as far as job openings. It takes a village!
- **Follow-up services**
 - **Question: When you think of “follow-up,” what do you picture?**
 - **Response:** Providing resources.
 - **Response:** Supervise and refine.
 - **Response:** Conversations on how the job is going and determining if they need anything.
 - **Response:** Letting your veterans know you will be conducting a 30-, 60-, and 90-day follow-up helps because they will expect your calls.
 - **Follow-up services for placed veterans**
 - Follow-up services help reduce attrition, which is good for the veteran and for the employer. It is more than just getting proof of placement for reporting purposes, even though that is part of it. It also shows the veterans that we have a genuine interest in their long-term success and personal accomplishments.
 - Obtaining proof of placement after the veterans land the job can help us continue to serve future participants who could benefit from our services. It also allows us to prepare our veterans to expect a scheduled check-in with them, so they will be more likely to respond to calls or messages.
 - Continue to provide HVRP services as appropriate to reduce barriers when necessary. Just because someone gets a job does not mean they are immediately financially stable enough to take handle all the residual barriers they may face with getting into the job, getting to and from work, and so on. Additionally, maybe someone obtained an entry-level position and is interested in advancing their career. Continue to provide the support they need to prepare for promotions or positions with greater responsibility.
 - Involve community support when necessary to ensure your participants’ employment success. When partnering with case managers, whether for housing, faith-based supports, or other social services programs, ensure that your peers who have a vested interest in your veterans’ success are kept updated on each person’s progress when supporting releases of information are in place.
 - Utilize placed veterans as peer mentors for newer program veterans. The military is designed so that as a person advances, that person is

increasingly responsible for preparing the next person behind them to move up in rank. HVRP can be looked at through a similar lens. If placed veterans feel like they can be a part of something bigger by helping to prepare the next program participant to move up in the program, they may be more likely to be successful in maintaining their job to set an example for their peers.

- Encourage veterans to seek out veteran-based employee resource groups (ERG) within their new companies. If the company does not have one, empower the veteran to open the discussions with their leadership about beginning one. If a veteran feels a sense of belonging and comradery within their workplace, they will feel more comfortable staying with that employer longer.

- **Follow-up services for employers**

- Post-placement services are not limited to only veterans. Providing follow-up services for employers can help reduce perception-based attrition, provide HVRP staff insights into performance issues, and more.
- Address employee issues their employers are experiencing that veterans might not want to discuss with their HVRP case manager.
 - If punctuality or absenteeism is an issue, does the veteran need assistance with transportation resources that HVRP can address?
 - Is it a work performance issue, and if so, can the HVRP case manager provide support to help the veteran engage?
 - If the issue is related to what the employer perceives as the veteran having a poor attitude or negativity in the workplace, is this actually the case, or is it a lack of understanding of military culture?
- Offer Military Cultural Competency training by request, as previously discussed.
- Maintain a strong level of communication with the employer, following up regularly to check in on any issues that may arise with participants placed within their company. Offer your services and empower the employer to reach out to you as a resource.
- Solicit feedback from employers to help you improve your service delivery to that employer and other employers with whom you partner.

- **Discussion Questions**

- **Question:** How confident are you post-training regarding your knowledge about providing follow-up services?
 - **Response:** We do not want to overstep with employers and their policies. If a veteran has challenges with the employer, we are reluctant to step in. What if there is a policy that describes how to proceed if there are challenges? We do not want to be the middle person or step on toes.

- **Response:** Maybe you can help the veteran better understand that workplace stress is not unique to veterans. Everyone experiences it in some way, and there are positive ways to deal with it. Ask the employer what they would like to see from us if we have participants who are concerned about leadership. There is a fine line between being an advocate for the veteran and building a relationship with the employer. Work out possible scenarios with the employer before they come up.
 - **Response:** Following up with the veteran creates a level of rapport and lets them know that someone other than the employer is interested in their success.
 - **Response:** When a veteran looks to service providers for help, they want to know that they are genuinely invested in their success. Veterans also want buy-in from service providers to feel supported and build trust.
- **Additional questions**
 - **Question:** Will we ever be able to attend state fairs and festivals to promote our program to veterans who have not heard of HVRP?
 - **Response:** That is a great question to discuss with your GOTR to see if that is allowed by your program or if that will be an additional cost. It is great to go to events where there will likely be a veteran presence. You can also engage with their family members who can help encourage the veteran in the family unit to seek help.
 - **Question:** Any advice on how to build a helpful relationship with our U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employers to open those options for our veterans, other than the job centers that refer them to the USA Jobs website?
 - **Response:** Identify your local VA service providers and build relationships with outside resources, such as the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) programs, Grant and Per Diem (GPD) programs, or Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV). Ask the hiring managers at the VA for a warm handoff.

Conclusion

We can improve placement outcomes for our program participants through meaningful connections and positive, collaborative engagement with our local employers. By building strong two-way lines of communication, we can help our employers overcome misunderstandings about hiring veterans and the circumstances surrounding housing instability. Providing follow-up services for veterans and employers improves the retention rate of our program veterans and further empowers employers to continue to engage with HVRP.

HVRP grantees can request individualized TA for their program at any time by emailing contact@nvtac.org.

For more information, please visit www.nvtac.org.

You can review the presentation through the following link: [NVTAC HVRP VLC Session Three: Employer Engagement and Post-Placement Follow-Up](#)