

**National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Virtual Learning Courses (VLC)
Session 4 of 4: Strategies to Enhance Veteran Engagement
May 7, 2024, 2 p.m. ET**

NVTAC Staff

Temitope Fagbemi, NVTAC Coach

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.
- **Veteran Engagement**
 - Building participant buy-in is a crucial aspect of the HVRP. It involves establishing trust and ensuring that veterans feel valued and are invested in their success within the program. Encouraging buy-in begins with outreach and continues throughout the entire HVRP process, including follow-up support. At intake, providing veterans with an overview of the program's services, training, and support can motivate them to actively participate.
 - Highlighting the comprehensive services HVRP offers is essential to promoting buy-in during outreach and intake. Each veteran participant should be treated as an individual with unique skills, preferences, and goals. Active listening and understanding the veteran's perspective are key components of this process.
 - It's important to recognize that HVRP participants may have experienced trauma, which can affect their engagement and decision-making. Providers should validate their experiences, demonstrate empathy, and offer support tailored to their needs. By prioritizing participant buy-in and understanding their individual journeys, HVRP can effectively support veterans in their transition to civilian employment.
- **Individualized Career Path**
 - Considering the veteran's skills, interests, and goals is essential in HVRP because each participant brings a unique set of experiences and aspirations shaped by their military background and personal history.

- By tailoring employment and training opportunities to meet individual needs, HVRP fosters a sense of ownership in the veteran's journey toward sustainable employment. This approach promotes buy-in from veterans by engaging with them beyond surface-level interactions and offering choices to promote autonomy.
- Practical examples of this approach include ensuring veterans understand and have access to the goals and services provided by HVRP, seeking feedback on the process and progress, and utilizing a person-centered approach that considers the impact of employment on the veteran's overall well-being.
- By prioritizing veterans' individual needs and goals, HVRP can effectively support their transition to civilian employment and foster long-term success.
- **Mentorship and Peer Support**
 - Establishing mentorship programs in HVRP can provide valuable inspiration and support to veteran participants. For instance, pairing veterans currently experiencing homelessness with mentors who have successfully transitioned from homelessness to employment can offer guidance and motivation.
 - Peer-to-peer activities, such as creating peer support networks, can further foster trust and interest within the veteran community, promoting HVRP services through word-of-mouth recommendations.
 - These mentorship and peer support initiatives aim to build a supportive community that encourages engagement and resilience throughout the employment process. By facilitating connections and sharing experiences, HVRP can effectively support veterans in their journey toward sustainable employment and personal growth.
- **Integrated Support Services**
 - Integrated support services in HVRP go beyond job placement, encompassing comprehensive assistance through partnerships with various wrap-around services. These services address critical needs such as mental health support, housing assistance, child care, and transportation.
 - Familiarizing oneself with organizations in the community and the services they provide is essential to utilizing integrated support services effectively. This integrated approach addresses the multifaceted challenges veterans experiencing homelessness may encounter, promoting sustained engagement and retention in employment. Grant recipients should gain an understanding of organizations outside of their community that veterans may benefit from as well.
 - Support service models, such as the integrated support services model and the Housing First model, prioritize incremental connections to support services and stable housing, respectively. These models aim to reduce stress on staff and facilitate consistent follow-up, acknowledging the traumatic nature of homelessness and its impact on engagement with multiple services.
 - Real-world examples of implementing integrated support services include connecting with the local Continuum of Care (CoC) and researching local

organizations and their available services. By leveraging these resources, HVRP can provide comprehensive support to veterans experiencing homelessness, helping them overcome barriers to employment and achieve stability.

- **Professional Development**

- Offering, identifying, and targeting skills aligned with current market demands is essential to HVRP to enhance veteran skill sets and maximize their potential for employment success. This involves identifying veterans' current skills and providing them with the necessary tools and training to further enhance their abilities.
- To boost engagement, it's crucial to recognize and celebrate veteran success, emphasizing motivation throughout the employment process. Positive reinforcement of progress plays a significant role in maintaining engagement and momentum.
- Additionally, certification initiatives can provide veterans with recognized credentials that enhance their employability and competitiveness in the job market. By focusing on skills aligned with market demands and providing support and recognition, HVRP can effectively empower veterans to achieve sustainable employment outcomes.
- **Discussion Question:** What additional strategies for veteran engagement have been successful in your HVRP experience?
 - **Response:** Case conferencing with our Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) partners to have everyone on the same page toward success.
 - **Response:** Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) goals.
- **Discussion Question:** What comes to mind when you think of employer engagement?
 - **Response:** Proactively reach out to potential employers to introduce them to our program and its benefits.
 - **Response:** Attend and participate in career fairs to network with employers.
 - **Response:** Educate employers about the program and the benefits they receive by establishing a partnership.
 - **Response:** Establish connections with employers to foster ongoing collaboration.
 - **Response:** Connect with employers who are criminal background friendly and who are open to hiring individuals with criminal backgrounds.
 - **Response:** Connect to employers that meet the veterans' needs/goals and are willing to work with barriers. Have provided character letters and assist with criminal background by using bonding.
 - **Response:** Reach out to organizations like the American Legions: informing relevant organizations about our program expands our network.

- **Response:** Address challenges faced by veterans with degrees and criminal backgrounds and acknowledge the difficulties in finding employment for veterans,
 - **Response:** Request tours of employer facilities, allowing us to learn more about their operations and needs.
 - **Response:** Utilize resources like the Federal Bonding Program and explore resources to address financial concerns associated with hiring veterans with various backgrounds.
- **Business Partnerships and Job Placement**
 - Cultivating partnerships with community employers is vital for a successful HVRP. This involves actively engaging with employers by visiting their sites or inviting them to participate in HVRP events.
 - Matching veterans with jobs that align with their skills and connecting them with employers who value their experience are key strategies to foster employment retention. However, challenges such as addressing misconceptions or stigma about the community HVRP serves and providing ongoing support to the employer and the veteran may arise.
 - Using real-life examples illustrates how advocacy and showcasing HVRP services are crucial in addressing barriers (like justice involvement or prior evictions) veterans encounter when securing housing. Adopting a strengths-based approach is considered a best practice to showcase the benefits of HVRP and hiring veterans to potential employers. By leveraging partnerships and emphasizing veterans' strengths, HVRP can effectively facilitate successful employment outcomes.
- **Employer Engagement: Job Development with Employers**
 - Understanding that job development involves selling skills is crucial to HVRP. This means recognizing that selling skills are distinct from HVRP case management skills and involve effectively showcasing the work experience and education that veterans bring to the table.
 - Maintaining a "business mindset" is essential, as it instills confidence in filling employers' hiring needs. This confidence is crucial when cold calling, and having a template script can be helpful in this process.
 - Expert knowledge of the local labor market, trends, and opportunities is essential to focus contact efforts effectively. By understanding the needs of employers and leveraging local labor market insights, HVRP can successfully match veterans with meaningful employment opportunities.
- **Employer Engagement: Develop an Employer Network**
 - To maximize job development efforts in HVRP, it's essential to leverage established connections, whether personal, within the community, or through board members. Cultivating trust with employers involves learning about their business and following up with requests for information, as this can lead to fruitful partnerships. Utilizing veterans' networks and employer referrals can also

be valuable in building a network and expanding job opportunities. Establishing an internal job bank tailored to the skills and career goals of HVRP participants helps focus job development efforts and goes beyond mere job placement. Moreover, thinking beyond placement involves inviting employers to visit the agency, attending events, or volunteering, which can establish ongoing partnerships and further support veterans' employment goals. By leveraging connections, cultivating trust, and thinking creatively about partnerships, HVRP can effectively support veterans' transition to meaningful employment.

- **Employer Engagement Tips**

- Connecting with employers who have a significant presence in the community and prioritize hiring veterans is a strategic approach in HVRP. To initiate contact, ask to visit the employer for informational purposes and inquire about current or future job opportunities.
- When engaging with employers, emphasize HVRP as a valuable, no-cost service that provides access to an untapped labor pool of motivated and skilled veterans. Additionally, inform employers about the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), which incentivizes hiring veterans. Always highlight the strengths and qualifications of veterans rather than focusing on their homelessness or at risk status, adopting a strengths-based approach. Offer follow-up services and ongoing support to employers throughout the hiring process.
- Maintain confidence in the value that veterans bring to the workforce and convey this to employers, emphasizing that HVRP facilitates the recruitment of motivated and skilled employees. By establishing partnerships based on mutual benefit and support, HVRP can effectively connect veterans with meaningful employment opportunities.
- **Discussion Question:** What additional strategies for employer engagement have been successful in your HVRP experience?
 - **Response:** Make proactive outreach calls to potential employers to introduce them to our program and explore partnership opportunities.
 - **Response:** Conduct face-to-face interactions with employers, which is often more effective in building relationships.
 - **Response:** Host a “Job Club” where employers are invited to speak and recruit from our pool of veterans. Identify community events attended by employers and use these opportunities to engage in conversations about how HVRP can support them.
 - **Response:** Attend chamber of commerce business meetings to network with employers and discuss potential collaborations.
 - **Response:** Connect with the CEC and other stakeholders that engage these employers and present a unified and cohesive approach to employers.

- **Veteran Engagement for Job Retention**

- Maintaining veteran buy-in is crucial not only during the HVRP process but also throughout retention and follow-up efforts.

- Job retention represents the culmination of the HVRP experience for both the veteran and the grant recipient, yet it may present unique challenges in understanding veterans' individual needs, skills, and barriers to sustained employment.
- Recognizing that job retention begins at the point of outreach, ensuring veterans understand HVRP retention documentation requirements, and emphasizing the importance of retention information throughout the HVRP experience are key to successful retention. By prioritizing ongoing engagement and support, HVRP can effectively promote veterans' retention in employment and long-term success.
- **Case Management Strategies to Promote Retention**
 - Identifying and addressing potential stressors that may lead to job loss is a critical aspect of case management in HVRP.
 - To support veterans in managing workplace stress, action steps can be identified and implemented when triggered. This may involve providing mentorship, employer support, and resources tailored to the veteran's needs. Normalizing the experience of workplace stress fosters open communication and encourages veterans to seek assistance when facing challenges.
 - Engaging wrap-around supports, such as housing case workers, therapists, family members, and community networks, is essential to promote job retention and overall well-being. Regular check-ins with employed veterans, both by phone and in person, allow for proactive support and intervention to prevent job loss.
 - Following up with employers, with veteran approval, helps to provide ongoing support and address any concerns that may arise in the workplace. Additionally, celebrating employed veterans' achievements through recognition at agency events, on a "working wall," and in HVRP marketing materials reinforces their success and promotes a positive work environment. By implementing these strategies, HVRP can effectively support veterans in maintaining employment and achieving long-term stability.

Conclusion

Fostering trust, highlighting program benefits, and tailoring services to meet individual needs are essential to build veteran participant buy-in. Veterans' skills, interests, and goals play a significant role in their placement and retention. Mentorship programs and peer support networks can provide additional support throughout these processes.

Moreover, cultivating partnerships with community employers and leveraging established connections can significantly enhance the effectiveness of HVRP programs. Additionally, integrated support services, such as mental health assistance and housing support, address veterans' multifaceted needs and promote sustained engagement. By implementing innovative strategies and best practices, HVRP grant recipients can effectively enhance veteran engagement, support their transition to stable employment, and ultimately improve their overall well-being and quality of life. Through continued collaboration, innovation, and dedication, we can make a meaningful impact on the lives of our veterans.

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 Four: Strategies to Enhance Veteran Engagement](#)