

**National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)  
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Community of Practice (CoP)  
Justice-Involved Veterans  
Thursday, May 30, 2024, 3 pm – 4 p.m. ET**

## **NVTAC Staff**

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## **Key Points**

- **Introduction**
  - NVTAC staff introduced the topic and purpose of today's CoP: strategies for working with justice-involved veterans. NVTAC also reminded participants that any best practices shared during the training should be discussed with their Grant Officer Technical Representatives (GOTR) prior to implementation to ensure the activity is an allowable cost or will require amendments to their grants.
- **Interactive Activity:**
  - Poll: Does your organization currently engage with incarcerated veterans?
    - All respondents answered "yes."
- **NVTAC Overview**
  - NVTAC provided a brief overview of its role, which includes offering technical assistance (TA), peer-to-peer opportunities, and support for HVRP grantees.
- **Definition and Statistics**
  - Grant recipients may serve an eligible veteran transitioning from incarceration who is scheduled to be released from incarceration within 12 months, if they meet the following definition per [38 U.S.C. § 2023](#):
    - A veteran who is a resident of a penal institution or an institution that provides long term care for mental illness; *and*
    - Is at risk of homelessness absent referral and counseling services provided under the program.
  - Per VPL 02-23, [Attachment 1](#), VETS considers an "at risk" determination to involve factors deemed appropriate by the grant recipient; however, VETS does not permit grant recipients to determine that a veteran is "at risk" if the veteran is not scheduled to be released from incarceration within 12 months. Also, please note that the veterans transitioning from incarceration (scheduled to be released from incarceration within 12 months) do not need to meet the "at risk of homelessness" criteria defined in [42 U.S.C. § 11360](#).
  - Another category eligible under HVRP are veterans that have been released from incarceration (within the last 12 months) who are considered at risk of homelessness. These participants must meet the "at risk of homelessness" criteria defined in [42 U.S.C. § 11360](#).

- For HVRP purposes, a penal institution includes federal, state, county, and city facilities such as prisons, correctional centers, detention centers, reentry centers, penitentiaries, and jails unless specified otherwise.
- Statistics
  - According to the 2021 U.S. Census Bureau data, veterans make up approximately 6.5 percent of the U.S. population, yet 31 percent of veterans have been arrested at some point in their lives, compared with 18 percent of non-veterans.
  - Veterans account for nearly eight percent of individuals incarcerated in state prisons and more than five percent in federal institutions.
  - In a U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) study in 2011-2012, the U.S. National Inmate Survey showed that 62 percent of veterans in jails reported four or more prior arrests, and 68 percent of veterans in prisons reported at least one prior episode of incarceration.
  - Unemployed former prisoners were three times more likely to return to prison one year after release than employed individuals who make more than \$10 per hour.
- **Needs, Challenges, and Solutions**
  - Veterans who have justice-involved backgrounds have unique needs and challenges that HVRP providers can either directly or indirectly assist with. Justice-involved veterans may struggle with:
    - Finding and securing meaningful employment with companies that work with individuals with justice-involved backgrounds,
    - Connecting to resources and services to meet their needs,
    - Housing instability,
    - Addressing health needs – both physical and mental, and
    - Having healthy support systems to assist them through life.
  - As a provider, HVRP can help veterans connect to resources and services, assisting them to identify veteran-specific benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as well as benefits to assist with basic human needs.
  - According to a 2017 study by the U.S. Census Bureau, there are more than 18 million veterans in the U.S. and only about half of veterans are enrolled in the VA health care system.
- **Barriers and Solutions**
  - Veterans may need assistance with accessing their Personal Identifiable Information (PII).
    - Work with local service agencies who can assist in obtaining free forms of identification and birth certificates.
  - As discussed, veterans may have trouble finding and accessing resources and critical need items.

- Leverage resources with partnering agencies for items veterans need that HVRP does not provide, such as transportation, housing assistance, expungement services, and more.
- Housing instability or even finding acceptable housing may be an overwhelming barrier for veterans as they transition from incarceration.
  - Work with local housing resources, such as Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), Grant and Per Diem (GPD) programs, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development - Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH), and other non-veteran specific housing resources.
  - Set up case conferencing, if possible, to help coordinate between agencies to streamline services.
- Veterans with justice-involved backgrounds may have lapses in employment that can be difficult to explain to potential employers.
  - Coach veterans on how to explain lapses in employment during interviews.
  - Encourage veterans to engage in training opportunities, such as skills classes, certification programs, or degree programs that align with their career goals.
  - Promote the benefits of engaging in volunteer opportunities for causes they may be passionate about. This can boost self-confidence and help them get involved in the community, make connections, and connect with potential employers.
- Justice involvement is in itself a barrier to employment, depending on the nature of the offense(s) that the veteran may have been convicted of and their career interests. For example, if a veteran was convicted of a cyber-related felony, they may not be eligible for information technology (IT) positions due to conditions of parole.
  - Identify other skills and interests the veteran may have that are less likely to have barriers to employment.
  - Find training or apprenticeship programs that may align with the veteran's career interests.
  - Inform employers of tax benefits of hiring veterans through the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) program.
  - Coach the veteran on how to talk to employers about their justice involvement in a way that is positive and healthy, not focusing on the specific details of the activity that led to conviction.
- Federal Bonding Program
  - The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Federal Bonding Program provides fidelity bonds to both “at-risk” and hard-to-place individuals seeking employment. It covers the first six months of employment at no cost to the job applicant or the employer.

- The program targets individuals whose backgrounds can pose significant barriers to securing or retaining employment, including justice-involved veterans, individuals recovering from substance use disorders, recipients of state food or financial benefits, individuals with poor credit records, economically disadvantaged youth and young adults with little to no work histories, and individuals dishonorably discharged from the military.
- **Strategies for Case Managers**
  - Trauma-informed care (TIC) involves understanding and addressing the impact of trauma on individuals. By integrating this approach into our practice, we can better support the veterans we serve.
    - Safety
      - Our primary goal is to create an environment where veterans feel physically and emotionally safe. This involves ensuring that our facilities are welcoming and secure and that our interactions are respectful and non-threatening.
    - Trustworthiness
      - Building trust is essential. This means being transparent in our operations and consistently following through on our commitments.
    - Choice
      - Empowering veterans by providing choices and encouraging them to have a voice in their care is crucial and promotes a sense of control over their own recovery journey.
    - Collaboration
      - Working collaboratively with veterans and involving them in the decision-making process fosters a sense of partnership. This helps in building stronger, more effective support plans.
    - Empowering Environment
      - Creating an environment that empowers veterans is vital. This includes recognizing their strengths, providing opportunities for skill-building, and fostering a supportive community that promotes healing and growth.
  - Understanding trauma in justice-involved veterans
    - Combat-Related Trauma
      - Many veterans have faced intense and life-threatening situations during combat. These experiences can leave lasting emotional and psychological scars that influence their daily lives and interactions.
    - Physical Trauma
      - Physical injuries sustained during service can have both immediate and long-term impacts on a veteran's well-being (i.e., chronic pain).
    - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)



- Offer cultural competence training for employers around military service and veterans, as well as for employing justice-involved individuals.
    - Regularly assess available resources for effectiveness and identify potential gaps in service to continuously improve service provision.
    - Establish peer support groups between newly transitioned/transitioning veterans and veterans who have transitioned from incarceration and have successfully gained employment.
    - Collaborate with community resources to identify which agencies can cover human needs, such as housing, health care (both physical and mental), and overall well-being and quality of life.
  - Reentry and legal services
    - Ensure justice-involved veterans have access to legal resources and support to address issues such as expungement, parole/probation compliance, driver's license reinstatement, and resolving outstanding warrants.
      - Establish partnerships and coordination with legal service providers to streamline access to legal assistance and maximize the effect of these services. Legal representation by partnering providers can help justice-involved veterans with legal proceedings related to housing, employment, benefits, and other relevant areas.
      - Provide comprehensive reentry support services that address each individual's needs to facilitate successful reintegration and reduce the risk of recidivism.
  - Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO)
    - REO provides funding for justice-involved youth and young adults who were formerly incarcerated. Some of the core services that REO offers include assistance with apprenticeships, case management, career exploration through work experience and internships, employer connections, high school diploma equivalency preparation, job placements, and more.
  - Employment and Recidivism
    - Employment plays a pivotal role in reducing recidivism – the likelihood of formerly incarcerated veterans from offending again and reentering the legal system or returning to incarceration. Studies consistently show that veterans who secure employment upon release from incarceration are significantly less likely to re-offend. Stable employment provides the financial stability necessary to support themselves and their families, reducing the economic pressures that can lead to re-offending.
    - Strategies for assisting veterans in obtaining employment:

- Proactive outreach and engagement: initiate outreach efforts to connect with justice-involved veterans, providing them with information and resources on employment opportunities.
  - Comprehensive vocational training: offer vocational training programs that equip veterans with skills and certifications necessary for meaningful employment across various industries.
  - Holistic job placement assistance: provide comprehensive assistance with job search activities, resume writing, interview preparation, and connecting with employers who are supportive of hiring justice-involved individuals.
  - Mentorship and peer support networks: establish mentorship programs and peer support networks to offer veterans guidance, encouragement, and practical advice throughout the employment process.
- Strategies for assisting veterans in maintaining employment
  - Ongoing support and case management: provide continuous support services to veterans post-placement to help them navigate workplace challenges and ensure long-term job retention.
  - Continuous skills development: offer opportunities for veterans to enhance their skills and pursue continuing education opportunities to advance in their careers and maintain employment stability.
  - Advocacy for workplace accommodations: advocate for reasonable workplace accommodations and support services to address any barriers or challenges veterans may face in the workplace due to their justice involvement or physical/mental limitations.
  - Active employer engagement: engage with employers to foster a supportive and inclusive work environment for justice-involved veterans, emphasizing the benefits of hiring and retaining this population.
- Importance of vocational training and job placement assistance
  - Vocational training and job placement assistance are essential for justice-involved veterans as they provide skills and opportunities necessary for stable employment. This stability reduces the likelihood of re-offending by offering financial independence, a sense of purpose, and a structured routine. Additionally, gaining employment helps veterans build social connections and reintegrate into their communities, significantly enhancing their overall well-being and reducing recidivism rates.
  - Vocational training equips justice-involved veterans with practical skills and certifications relevant to current job market demands, enhancing their employability and job readiness (construction, plumbing, medical billing, culinary skills, office management,

renewable energy jobs, data entry, and soft skills such as problem-solving).

- Job placement programs connect veterans with employment opportunities aligned with their skills, interests, and goals, facilitating career advancement and long-term success.
- By securing meaningful employment through vocational training and job placement, veterans gain financial stability and independence, reducing their reliance on government assistance and lowering the risk of recidivism.
- Successful employment through vocational training and job placement promotes veterans' integration into the workforce and society, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose, which are essential factors in reducing recidivism.

- **Outreach and In-Reach Strategies**

- The three primary methods of outreach conducted by HVRP grant recipients are direct engagement, engagement with secondary providers, and marketing/public awareness.
  - Hosting a resource table at an expungement event to reach veterans seeking legal assistance is an example of direct engagement.
  - Connecting with a legal aid clinic serving veterans that refers to HVRP for additional services is an example of engagement with secondary providers.
  - Finally, creating marketing materials (flyers, social media posts, infographics) that are targeted toward justice-involved veterans by highlighting HVRP's specific benefits for this population is an example of marketing and increasing public awareness.
  - Engaging with secondary providers will likely be the most successful method for reaching justice-involved veterans.
- Secondary providers
  - Secondary providers put your organization in contact with a pool of potential participants with confirmed justice involvement. Examples of secondary providers to help connect to this target population include jails, prisons, courts, correctional facilities, probation/parole offices, job training providers, rehabilitation/treatment programs, and legal aid clinics.
  - It is important to connect with institutions and programs involved in each stage of justice involvement – from arrest to release – that are veteran-specific as well as for the general population.
  - Examples of local secondary providers by state:
    - Maine: Kennebec County Sheriff's Office Incarcerated Veterans Initiative assists veterans and their families in their transition from incarceration to the community.





- HCRV specialists can be found and contacted through the VA’s website for homeless programs.
  - Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC)
    - VTC’s mission is to provide veterans with treatment for the unique clinical needs contributing to their justice involvement, such as substance abuse, mental health disorders, PTSD, and more.
    - VTC accomplishes this through utilizing evidence-based treatments, mandatory drug testing, incentives and/or sanctions, and recovery support services in judicially supervised court settings.
    - VTCs are administered by local courts and funded by local governments, making the processes, eligibility, and contacts vary by locality.
  - Coordination between VTCs and HVRP
    - Targeted referrals
      - VTCs identify justice-involved veterans and refer them to HVRP for tailored support.
    - Integrated case management
      - Establish case management collaboration and cooperation between VTC and HVRP staff.
    - Comprehensive services
      - Leverage resources to provide veterans access to a wide range of services.
    - Peer support
      - Utilize veteran mentors who have successfully navigated both systems to provide guidance
    - Evaluation
      - Assess the effectiveness of joint intervention between VTC and HVRP, the successes of the collaboration, and opportunities for improvement.
  - VTC and employment
    - A national study of VTC participants (*Who Benefits and Who Recidivates [2018]*) was conducted to identify how VTC involvement impacted outcomes in functional domains, such as housing, employment, income, and recidivism. It also identified traits such as history of incarceration and types of offense that were predictive of outcomes in each domain.
      - Study findings highlighted the importance of proper substance abuse treatment as well as employment services for VTC participants so that they could benefit from the diversion process.
  - National resources for justice-involved veterans



backgrounds and acknowledge that they will have challenges that non-justice-involved individuals do not.

- Maintain unconditional positive regard. It is not necessary to agree with what someone has done in their past. It is human nature to have feelings about choices that someone has made that you might, in your personal set of values, find offensive; however, it is crucial as a provider that we maintain focus on employment services and assisting individuals with improving themselves through employment without allowing our values to interfere with service delivery.
  - Discuss ways to talk about criminal history or justice involvement and how **not** to talk about criminal history or justice involvement when asked by potential employers. It is okay to disclose facts without providing colorful details.
  - Help your veterans refocus discussions about their justice involvement from what has happened in the past to what comes next. Teach them to redirect conversations professionally from who they were when their choices led them to incarceration or arrest to where they are today and where they want to be tomorrow.
  - Assist justice-involved veterans with anger management skills to help them cope with the rejections they may receive in their search for employment. Help them learn how to accept rejections with grace, because what might be an initial “no” today might be a “yes” tomorrow.
  - Help veterans truly understand their situations. Listen to their stories, and explain barriers to certain fields. As previously discussed, someone with cyber crimes in their history will struggle with obtaining IT-related jobs, just as someone with criminal sexual conduct offenses in their background will not be able to work in or near schools.
  - Prepare veterans for a more difficult journey to employment while still maintaining the idea of achievability in their situations.
  - Change the narrative for justice-involved veterans from being “ex-cons” to “community members” by helping them find and engage in volunteer opportunities.
  - Help veterans mitigate their expectations versus reality. To get results, they have to put in the work.
- Locating and engaging with justice-involved veterans
    - As previously mentioned, we have to effectively find and engage with our veterans at all stages of justice involvement – from arrest to release. We can do that through partnerships with the state DOJ, non-profit organizations, the VA’s VJO program, local law enforcement agencies, VTCs, and in-reach to state and federal correctional facilities.

- Serving justice-involved veterans
  - It is crucial that we continue to provide the best possible services for our veterans regardless of justice involvement. Continue to advocate for justice-involved veterans when talking to employers, seek volunteer opportunities outside of employment, build relationships with training providers, and build peer support opportunities between new participants and successfully employed justice-involved veterans.
  - Finally, continue to provide standard HVRP activities – job searching, resume writing, barrier reduction, and so on.

## Conclusion

Justice-involved veterans may have unique needs and challenges; however, through our work, collaboration with justice system resources, and persistence in advocacy and service, we can help reduce the impact of those challenges.

## Resources

- [Veterans' Program Letter \(VPL\) 02-23 HVRP Participant Eligibility, Attachment 1](#)
- [VA \(Veterans and the Criminal Justice System\)](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau](#)
- [DOJ - Veterans in Prison](#)
- [DOJ: Veterans in Prison and Jail, 2011–12](#)
- [Justice-Involved Veterans and Employment](#)
- [National Academy of Sciences - Veterans Challenges](#)
- [National Veterans' Training Institute \(NVTI\) 9610/JIVS: Career Coaching for Special Populations: Serving Justice-Involved Veterans \(JIVs\)](#)
- [NVTI Continuing Conversations: Serving Justice-Involved Veterans](#)
- [National Reentry Resource Center](#)
- [Bureau of Prisons Employment Information Handbook](#)
- [Cleanslate Clearinghouse](#)
- [Find a Reentry Program near you](#)
- [Portal for Employers](#)
- [Portal for Justice-Involved Individuals](#)

You can review the presentation slides here: [NVTAC May 2024 CoP](#)