National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Community of Practice (CoP)
Strategies for Serving Justice-Involved Veterans
Thursday, August 27th, 2026, 3:00pm-4:00p.m. ET

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Key Points

- **Introduction**
  - NVTAC staff reminded attendees that while best practices would be discussed during the presentation, grant recipients should consult with their Grant Officer's Technical Representative (GOTR) before implementing any new strategies or activities.
  - This webinar focused on serving justice-involved veterans holistically and recognizing that stable employment is only one part of successful reintegration into civilian life.
  - Presenters emphasized that veterans in this population face several interconnected needs, challenges, and solutions at once, rather than a single isolated issue, and that case managers should assess and support the whole person: housing, health care, identification and benefits, legal involvement, and community connection, alongside employment.
- **Needs, Challenges, and Solutions**
  - Needs: Justice-involved veterans face a wide, interconnected set of needs. Securing meaningful employment is HVRP's primary outcome, but it depends on addressing the full picture: employment, housing, physical/mental health, benefit connections with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and beyond, support system, and access to peer networks.
  - Challenges: Justice-involved veterans may also face a variety of barriers to employment, including but not limited to:
    - Lack of access to forms of identification (i.e. IDs, birth certificates)
    - Lack of access to resources for critical needs (i.e. transportation)
    - Housing
    - Lapses in employment
    - Justice involvement
  - Solutions: Potential solutions for the challenges include:
    - Working with local agencies that can provide free access to identification
    - Leveraging resources from partner agencies
    - Collaborating with local housing resources (VA and non-VA)

        - Providing coaching to professionally explain a gap in employment and encouraging training, certifications, and volunteering to boost confidence in the job market
        - Identifying employment opportunities unrelated to the nature of their crime, informing the veteran of their rights, informing employers of the tax benefits of hiring veterans, and coaching veterans on how to talk with employer about their justice involvement.
    - The U.S. Department of Labor's Federal Bonding Program provides fidelity bonds to "at risk" and hard-to-place individuals seeking employment, covering the first six months of employment at no cost to the applicant or employer. It targets individuals whose backgrounds pose significant barriers to securing or retaining work.
- **Strategies for Case Managers**
    - Case managers provide personalized assistance tailored to each veteran's unique circumstances, helping them navigate housing, health care, legal aid, and employment systems that can otherwise feel overwhelming.
    - Trauma-Informed Care
        - Trauma-informed care involves understanding and addressing the impact of trauma on individuals. Key principles to apply when working with veterans:
            - Safety: how you respond to veterans, especially when they disengage or disclose something difficult
            - Trustworthiness: following through on commitments (e.g., warm hand-offs at the time promised).
            - Choice: giving veterans agency and options rather than dictating next steps.
            - Collaboration: building the job plan together with the veteran, not for them
            - Empowerment: framing conversations around strengths, not deficits.
        - Trauma can profoundly influence behavior, coping mechanisms, and a veteran's ability to reintegrate into civilian life. Common traumas among veterans include combat-related and physical trauma. disengagement, missed appointments, or confrontational behavior are often trauma responses, not personal reflections on the case manager — understanding this distinction helps prevent burnout.
        - Strategies that incorporate trauma-informed care into case management include:
            - Training and education: stay current on the effects of trauma and best practices
            - Assessment: identify both visible needs and the underlying trauma shaping behavior

        - Create safe environments: build trust and encourage open engagement
        - Individualized care planning: tailor support to each veteran's unique circumstances.
        - Collaborative partnerships: coordinate with mental health providers and community resources rather than working in silos
- Supportive Service Options
    - Strategies to support justice-involved veterans can include:
        - Conducting needs assessments tailored to justice-involved veterans
        - Collaborating with justice system agencies (probation offices, courts, correctional facilities)
        - Assigning dedicated case managers to justice-involved veterans
        - Providing cultural competency training
        - Assessing resources and identify gaps
        - Establishing peer support groups
    - Collaboration with community resources, including reentry and legal services, are critical for justice-involved veterans seeking to reintegrate into the labor force.
        - Access to legal resources can assist with expungement, parole/probation compliance, driver's license reinstatement, and resolving outstanding warrants.
        - Coordination with legal service providers can lead to referral networks, access to on-site legal clinics, and partnerships that enable direct legal representation for housing, employment, and benefits matters.
        - Comprehensive reentry support can address legal, housing, employment, and health care needs together to reduce recidivism risk.
- Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO)
    - REO provides funding for justice-involved youth, young adults, and adults who were formerly incarcerated. Core services offered to REO participants include assessment, apprenticeship, case management, employment connections, mentoring, and more.
- Employment and Recidivism
    - Employment plays a pivotal role in reducing recidivism among justice-involved veterans. Veterans who secure employment upon release are consistently less likely to re-offend.
    - Strategies to assist justice-involved veterans in obtaining and maintaining employment include proactive outreach, job training, job placement assistance, mentorship, ongoing support, continuous skill development, advocacy for veterans' accommodations, and active engagement with employers.

- Importance of Vocational Training and Job Placement
    - Skill development: vocational training equips veterans with practical skills/certifications relevant to current market demands (e.g., construction, plumbing, medical billing)
    - Career pathways: job placement programs connect veterans to opportunities aligned with their skills, interests, and goals, supporting advancement
    - Stability and self-sufficiency: meaningful employment reduces reliance on government assistance and lowers recidivism risk
    - Community integration: successful employment fosters a sense of belonging and purpose, both essential to reducing recidivism

- **Outreach and In-Reach Strategies**
    - HVRP grant recipients generally rely on three outreach methods, each applicable to justice-involved veterans:
        - Direct engagement: e.g., hosting a resource table at an expungement event to reach veterans seeking legal assistance
        - Engagement with secondary providers: e.g., connecting with a legal aid clinic serving veterans that refers participants to HVRP for additional services
        - Marketing and public awareness: e.g., creating flyers, social media posts, and infographics that speak directly to justice-involved veterans and highlight HVRP's specific benefits for this population
    - Secondary Providers
        - Examples of secondary providers that connect programs to justice-involved veterans across every stage of involvement, from arrest to release: jails, prisons, courts, correctional facilities, legal aid clinics, etc.
        - Research programs for justice-involved individuals that are specific to your state or local community. An example of a local secondary provider is Maine Kennebec County Sheriff's Office Incarcerated Veterans Initiative in Maine.
    - VA Programs for Justice-Involved Veterans
        - Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO)
            - Mission: identify justice-involved veterans and reach out to facilitate access to VA services at the earliest possible point.
            - Method: build and maintain partnerships between the VA and key elements of the criminal justice system (courts, jails, prisons, etc.).
            - Contact: VJO Specialists provide direct assistance connecting veterans to VA benefits, services, and advocacy within the criminal justice system.
        - Health Care for Reentry Veterans (HCRV)
            - Mission: promote success and prevent homelessness among veterans returning home after incarceration.

        - Method: outreach and pre-release assessment for veterans in prison, referrals and linkages to services (including employment services on release), and case management.
    - Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC)
        - Mission: provide veterans with treatment for the unique clinical needs contributing to their justice involvement, such as substance use, mental health disorders, and trauma.
        - Method: evidence-based treatments, mandatory drug testing, incentives/sanctions, and recovery support services in judicially supervised court settings.
        - VTCs are administered by local courts and funded by local governments, so processes, eligibility, and contacts vary by locality.
        - Coordination between VTCs and HVRP can look like: targeted referrals, integrated case management, comprehensive services, peer support, and evaluation of the effectiveness of collaboration.
    - National Resources for Justice-Involved Veterans
        - National Institute of Corrections (NIC)
            - The Justice-Involved Veterans Network (JIVN) is a cross-divisional effort between NIC and the VA to identify service gaps and improve outcomes for veterans in the justice system. It assists with reentry, intercepting veterans already in the justice system, enhancing national VTCs, and sharing best practices that produce positive outcomes.
        - National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC)
            - The nation's primary source of information and guidance on reentry. NRRC facilitates information exchange (news, resources, funding opportunities), promotes best practices, and maintains a directory of current Second Chance Act (SCA) grantees with a comprehensive reentry grant profile for each state. SCA grants support state and local agencies in reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for people leaving incarceration.
    - Outreach Tips and Strategies
        - Prepare all outreach staff with a consistent set of outreach materials.
        - Approach with a clear ask.
        - Understand the benefits of HVRP for justice-involved veterans and for service providers within the justice system.
        - Provide quality service and follow-up to maintain the connection.
- Impactful Conversations with Justice-Involved Veterans
    - When communicating with justice-involved veterans:
        - Do not sugarcoat conversations
        - Offer unconditional positive regard

        - Coach veterans on how/when to talk about criminal history or justice involvement
        - Refocus conversations on what comes next rather than what happened in the past
        - Build anger management skills to help veterans work through barriers with employers or other community supports
    - Help veterans understand their situation by:
        - Listen to their story
        - Be honest about barriers to employment in certain fields (e.g., a cyber-related conviction may limit IT careers)
        - Prepare veterans for a potentially more difficult journey to employment
        - Help change the narrative from "ex-con" to "community member"
        - Manage expectations versus reality throughout the job search
    - You can locate and engage justice-involved veterans through:
        - State Department of Justice
        - Non-profit agencies
        - VJO
        - Local law enforcement agencies
        - VTCs
        - In-reach to state and federal correctional facilities
    - Additional strategies for serving justice-involved veterans include:
        - Advocating when talking to employers
        - Seeking alternative opportunities aside from employment, such as volunteer opportunities
        - Building relationships with training providers
        - Continuing "regular" HVRP activities alongside tailored support
        - Peer support opportunities

Conclusion

Justice-involved veterans come to HVRP with layered, interconnected needs. Housing, health care, benefits, access, and legal involvement all shape whether services provided by HVRP are successful. Case managers will achieve the best employment and retention outcomes by treating each veteran holistically rather than focusing on the job search alone. Trauma-informed, choice-driven case management builds the trust needed to keep veterans engaged, while strong partnerships with secondary providers (i.e. jails, prisons, courts, probation/parole offices, VA programs, VTCs) create the referral pipelines that reach this population most effectively. Stable employment reduces recidivism by restoring financial independence, purpose, and community connections. Achieving this aim is best when paired with honest coaching on how veterans discuss their history, setting realistic expectations, and coordinating with a network of supports.