



Interagency
Veterans
Advisory
Council

The State of Veterans in the Federal Workforce

2021 Annual Report

Washington, DC



VETERANS DAY

NOVEMBER 11, 2021

November 11, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The Interagency Veterans Advisory Council (“Interagency Veterans”) is pleased to submit its annual report covering the State of Veterans in the Federal Workforce for Fiscal Year 2021.


The nearly 100 Departments and Agencies that comprise Interagency Veterans proudly support the recruitment, acclimation, retention, and promotion of Veterans, Reservists, National Guard Personnel, and Military Spouses in the federal civilian workforce. Collectively, Interagency Veterans’ membership represents the interests of over 500,000 federal civilian employees who are Veterans across the government.


Our mission *Serving Those Who Served* is at the forefront of all we do: supporting agency leadership, fostering inclusive workforce communities, and supporting those who continue to serve our fellow Americans.

This year, we entered into a partnership with the White House’s *Joining Forces* initiative, spearheaded by First Lady Dr. Jill Biden, to create a military spouse program within Interagency Veterans.

The enclosed report outlines information on the structure of Employee Resource Groups, the activities of Interagency Veterans, information on activities throughout the government in support of the larger Veterans community and makes **recommendations** to improve the lives of Veteran employees and the larger community we serve.

We remain available to provide additional information and support upon request.


Lloyd Calderon
Chair


Adam Anicich
Vice Chair

Message from the Chair and Vice Chair

It is with great pleasure that we present the annual report of the Interagency Veterans Advisory Council, *The State of Veterans in the Federal Workforce*, to you – Veterans, Reservists, National Guard Personnel, Military Spouses, along with Supporters, and Families across the Government. This report covers the activities, best practices, and recommendations to improve the lives of Veterans within the federal workplace. This year we highlight influential work in the employee resource group space from around government, including some major milestones from agencies with well-developed Veterans’ groups. We also share details on the administrative maturation of Interagency Veterans, which included the development of new Officer Positions and collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders in the community – including the First Lady’s *Joining Forces* initiative and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

We are proud of the developments in Service to members and the community and feel that a strong architecture is crucial to *Serving Those Who Served*.

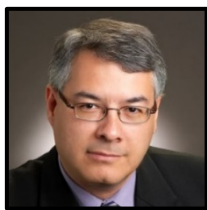
Since the inception of the Council more than a decade ago, we understood that our mission was to provide a voice for the voiceless – a voice for those who are not able to advocate for Veteran employee interests in Washington, D.C. or directly with the leaders of their agencies. To accomplish this, Interagency Veterans functions as a bi-directional conduit that allows for issues to be aggregated and elevated to the highest levels of Government, while simultaneously sharing and disseminating information to the half a million Veteran employees across the federal government.

Interagency Veterans prides itself on being the eyes and ears for senior decision makers. Nearly every agency has a Veterans or Military Employee Group, where individuals like you gather to find ways to continue serving others. You develop best practices, share insights and ideas, and improve esprit de corps wherever you go. It is our pleasure to serve you and support the unified mission of improving our communities together.

We look forward to receiving your input and feedback on Interagency Veterans’ activities, and welcome suggestions for improvement or collaboration in any areas that affect Veterans in the federal workplace.

Please do not hesitate to contact us directly if we, or the Interagency Veterans team, can be of assistance.

In continued Service to others,



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Advisory Council
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Executive Summary

The Interagency Veterans Advisory Council (“Interagency Veterans”) is comprised of the leadership of each Department and Agency’s Employee Resource Groups (ERG) relating to the Military, Veterans, and Military Spouses. There are nearly 100 Departments and Agencies that comprise Interagency Veterans, and collectively, we proudly support the recruitment, acclimation, retention, and promotion of Veterans, Military Reservists, National Guardsmen, and Military Families in the federal civilian workforce. Representing over 500,000 federal civilian employees who are Veterans, our members work across the globe – on multiple continents, across many time zones, in all 50 States and U.S. Territories, and all in Service to the American People.

Interagency Veterans is the Government-wide ERG for Military, Veterans, and Military Families.

Our mission *Serving Those Who Served* is at the forefront of all we do: supporting agency leadership, fostering inclusive workforce communities, and supporting those who continue to serve our fellow Americans.

In 2021, Interagency Veterans entered a period of organizational maturation, developing community and government partnerships, and more standardized engagement with members. This included a number of high-profile public meetings, collaborative partnerships with federal entities, and grassroots engagement efforts to reach federal employee Veterans who may not have historically received the same level of support from Washington, D.C.-based Departments and Agencies.

Additionally, Interagency Veterans built out technological capabilities to better host virtual events, including quarterly membership meetings, interactive dialogs with key stakeholders, a social media presence, and hosted mental health symposiums.

This report outlines the activities that Interagency Veterans conducted in Fiscal Year 2021, highlights a number of Departments’ and Agencies’ activities related to Veterans in the federal workforce, examines Veteran federal employment and the impact of COVID-19, discusses mental health challenges for Veterans in the federal workplace, provides some **recommendations** to senior leaders, and outlines the priorities to address in fiscal year 2022.

Interagency Veterans welcomes feedback from members and interested community stakeholders and seeks to build coalitions in support of Veterans in the federal workforce.

Employee Resource Groups

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are employee-led groups with members who are drawn together by a common interest and work towards advancing relevancy, diversity, and inclusion amongst the workforce.¹ ERGs assist in outreach to, and inclusion of, diverse organizations², and can increase retention, facilitate professional development, and connect employees across organizations.

Employees who join, and participate in, ERGs are more likely to be engaged, better informed, and better connected to agency organizational strategies, mission objectives, and more career oriented.³

ERGs, sometimes referred to in the context of supporting Special Emphasis Programs (SEPs), are a critical link between employees and senior management, connecting a diverse array of backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences to the Department's key decision-makers. They support the personal growth and professional development of their members, and they help develop programs and learning opportunities for themselves and the rest of the workforce.⁴

Each Department or Agency may have specific guidelines or procedures for how ERGs operate and conduct business, and how much time employees are allowed to devote to ERG activities during a given period.

It is also important to note that ERGs are not collective bargaining units (unions) and have no representational functions or legal standing over their members.⁵

History of Employee Resource Groups and Special Emphasis Programs

In 1972, Congress amended the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to extend the Act's anti-discrimination protections to Federal employees. Government agencies with responsibility for implementing the Act began to focus increased attention on underrepresented groups in the Federal workforce, such as racial/ethnic minorities, women, and individuals with disabilities, including disabled veterans. One way in which this was done was through the establishment of SEPs.⁶

SEPs have been authorized since the late 1960s and 1970s by Executive Branch regulations and Presidential Executive Orders for the purposes of helping underrepresented groups enter into the Federal workforce, develop professionally, and advance within its ranks⁷. In the 1970s and 1980s, SEPs played a

¹ See the National Park Service's Guidelines for NPS Employee Resource Groups at https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1244/upload/EmployeeResourceGroupGuidelines_2015.pdf.

² See Office of Personnel Management's Guidance for Agency-Specific Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plans at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/diversity-and-inclusion/reports/diagencyspecificstrategicplanguidance.pdf>.

³ See FedshireVets.gov's News at <https://www.fedshirevets.gov/news-media/news-items/2016/01/do-you-know-what-an-employee-resource-group-ergaffinity-group-ag-is/>.

⁴ See Department of Energy's Employee Resource Groups at <https://www.energy.gov/diversity/employee-resource-groups>.

⁵ See Office of Personnel Management's Labor-Management Relations page for information on collective bargaining agreements within the federal government at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/labor-management-relations/collective-bargaining-agreements/>.

⁶ See NASA's A Strategic Approach to Special Emphasis Programs at https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/sepm_guidance_012816_tagged.pdf.

⁷ See, e.g., Executive Order 11478; 5 C.F.R. Part 720.

vital role in addressing basic equal opportunity issues relevant at that time, for example, opening the door for greater numbers of African Americans and women to enter the government workforce.⁸

In 2011, the President issued Executive Order 13583⁹, “Establishing a Coordinated, Government-wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in the Federal Workforce.” D&I efforts reach out to segments of American society based on a host of individual characteristics, perspectives, and backgrounds – much broader than the race, gender, and disability focus of traditional SEPs.¹⁰

In June of 2021, President Biden signed Executive Order 14035 on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce, and named Veterans as one of the targeted communities.¹¹

Today, ERGs exist to support the inclusion and comradery among federal employees at nearly every Department and Agency.

Membership of Employee Resource Groups

Members of ERGs generally consist of federal employees drawn together as members or supporters of a particular cause relevant to the ERG they are affiliated with. Depending on the parameters for organization developed by the parent Department or Agency, ERGs may also consist of contractors or family members interested in the cause of the ERG.

Scope of Efforts of Employee Resource Groups

Most often, ERGs focus near-exclusively on internal services and support for their membership, but occasionally ERGs may focus on the local community, such as area beautification or assistance for homeless Veterans, as part of their larger service and inclusion goals.

⁸ See NASA’s A Strategic Approach to Special Emphasis Programs at https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/sepm_guidance_012816_tagged.pdf.

⁹ See Presidential Documents in the Federal Register at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2011-01-21/pdf/2011-1385.pdf>.

¹⁰ See NASA’s A Strategic Approach to Special Emphasis Programs at https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/sepm_guidance_012816_tagged.pdf.

¹¹ See Presidential Documents in the Federal Register at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-06-30/pdf/2021-14127.pdf>.

About the Interagency Veterans Advisory Council

The Interagency Veterans Advisory Council (“Interagency Veterans” or “The Council”) is comprised of the leadership of each Department and Agency’s Employee Resource Groups (ERG) relating to the Military and Veterans. There are nearly 100 Departments and Agencies that comprise Interagency Veterans, and collectively, we proudly support the recruitment, acclimation, retention, and promotion of Veterans, Military Reservists, National Guardsmen, and Military Families in the federal civilian workforce. Representing over 500,000 federal civilian employees who are Veterans, our members work across the globe – on multiple continents, across many time zones, in all 50 States and U.S. Territories, and all in Service to the American People.

Interagency Veterans is the Government-wide ERG for Military, Veterans, and Military Families across the federal government.

Interagency Veterans was established in response to Executive Order 13518¹² and Executive Order 13548¹³, to provide unity of effort in supporting Veteran and Disabled Veteran employment in the Federal Government. Over the past decade, Interagency Veterans has grown to support Veteran employment in the Federal Government by functioning as the organized conduit that receives input and aggregates issues from the respective Departmental and Agency Veteran ERGs. In doing so, Interagency Veterans sits at the intersection of government leadership and Veterans in the workforce – serving as the liaison and providing centralized support for Veterans ERGs, while providing decision support, recommendations, and data on Veterans to decision makers.

Our mission *Serving Those Who Served* is at the forefront of all we do: supporting agency leadership, fostering inclusive workforce communities, and supporting those who continue to serve our fellow Americans.

Functional Operations

Interagency Veterans serves as a bidirectional vehicle that can provide content-specific guidance and information downwards – throughout the federal government’s ERG network to support Veterans’ ERGs – as well as provide input and decision support upwards to the Office of Personnel Management, Departments and Agencies, and The White House on issues related to Veterans. As issues arise at the Agency and ERG level, Interagency Veterans surveys the Veteran ERG ecosystem to determine if the issue is isolated or systemic, and recommend solutions as appropriate.

To government leaders, Interagency Veterans functions as the focal point for directly connecting with federal Veteran employees and is utilized as a “boots on the ground” strategic partner to identify and address concerns of the federal Veteran workforce related to improving employment satisfaction and retention. Interagency Veterans supports all aspects of Veteran employees’ lifecycles within the federal government – recruiting, onboarding, acclimating, retention, and issue resolution, and troubleshooting other specific challenges as they arise.

Since Interagency Veterans can aggregate data, issues, and information in near real time through the distributed network across the federal government, the Council provides an additional tool to decision

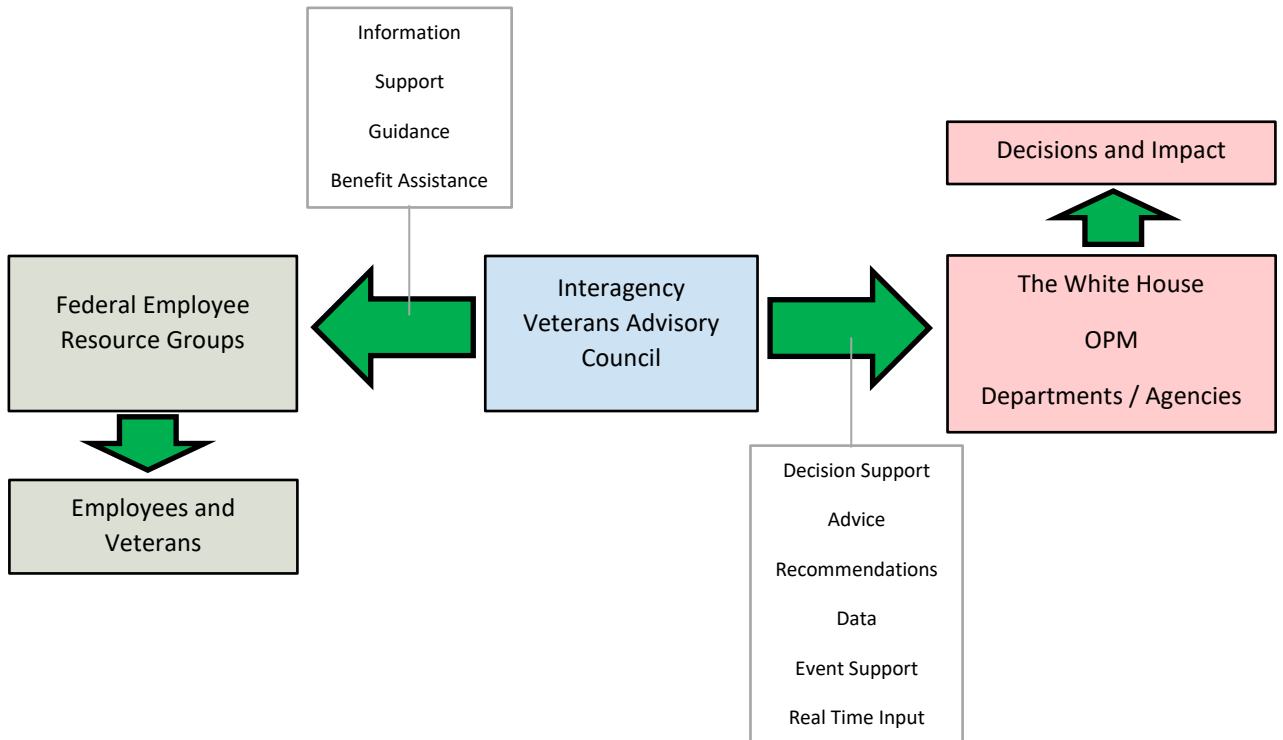
¹² See Presidential Documents in the Federal Register at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2009-11-13/pdf/E9-27441.pdf>.

¹³ See Presidential Documents in the Federal Register at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2010-07-30/pdf/2010-18988.pdf>.

makers at the national level. This provides the opportunity to leverage information to maintain and improve career opportunities and retention for Veterans or address ad hoc and timely situations.

Practical Workstream

The current structure and functions of Interagency Veterans are designed to fill in the gap between Veteran employees and senior government leaders. Addressing disconnects between programmatic goals and the contributions Veterans make, as well as offering support to Departments and Agencies in their planning and execution processes, are the main workstreams visible to partners and stakeholders.



Budget, Staffing, and Membership

Budget and Funding

Most ERGs do not have a budget allocated to them, and no more than de minimis funds are used to carry out ERG activities. The same is true of Interagency Veterans.

Interagency Veterans receives no taxpayer funding.¹⁴

¹⁴ No discretionary funding. No mandatory funding. No non-appropriated funds (NAF) funding.

Staffing and Personnel

Interagency Veterans has no full-time staff, and each Officer volunteers their time, in accordance with their Department's or Agency's policies, or on personal time, to conduct Interagency Veterans ERG business.

Staffing functions, such as recruiting and selections, are made via USAJOBS¹⁵ and USAJOBS' Open Opportunities¹⁶ using fair and open competitive principles¹⁷, and supervised by the Chief Administrative Officer. Occasionally, task-oriented developmental details may be utilized to secure specific talent for periods of less than 120 days on a part time basis. Candidates selected for these non-reimbursable details would perform Veterans ERG business for some minimal amount of time during a pay period (2-4 hours, for example) with supervisory permission, as a developmental assignment, to focus on a specific task.

Individual and Organizational Membership

Interagency Veterans' **membership** is comprised of the leaders of the individual Departments' and Agencies' Veterans, Military, and Military Spouse ERGs from across the government. As each Department or Agency develops their own, unique organizational structure for their ERGs, whomever they consider to be their leadership ("Chair," "Vice Chair," "Director," "Chief," "President," "Vice President," "Secretary," etc.) is automatically extended full membership in the Interagency Veterans Advisory Council. While this *de facto* ascension to membership is entirely voluntary, there has not been any individual or ERG who declined membership at the Interagency level.

Organizational Membership is determined through self-certification by the various ERGs. Once Interagency Veterans is notified that an ERG has chosen¹⁸ to be part of the Council, they are added to the directory and included on the distribution list.¹⁹

Non-voting members consist of individuals from across the government who have chosen to receive materials via the distribution list, attend events, and/or generally stay involved without having a formal leadership role.

As of the date of this report, there are nearly 100 Departments and Agencies that have participating ERGs, including over 200 ERG leaders (voting members) from across government, and nearly 1,600 non-voting members. These groups collectively represent just over 500,000 federal employee Veterans.

Members have no obligation or commitment to Interagency Veterans and are welcome to attend events (primarily virtual) or participate as their schedules and Agency policies allow.

¹⁵ See <https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/About/>.

¹⁶ See <https://openopps.usajobs.gov/>.

¹⁷ See the Merit Systems Protection Board's report on the Impact of Recruitment Strategy on Fair and Open Competition for Federal Jobs at https://www.mspb.gov/studies/studies/The_Impact_of_Recruitment_Strategy_on_Fair_and_Open_Competition_for_Federal_Jobs_1118751.pdf.







¹⁸ Through whatever mechanism that ERG chooses to make decisions. Sometimes there are votes, other times it is simply a verbal authorization on the spot.

¹⁹ This distribution list includes quarterly calendar invites, email newsletters, and ad hoc events throughout the year.

Interagency Veterans Advisory Council Executive Board

The Officers of the Executive Board are the leaders of the Interagency Veterans Advisory Council that conduct the day-to-day activities, coordinate, and develop programing and priorities, consult with Departments and Agencies on Veterans’ issues, and provide overall guidance and leadership to the nearly 100 Departments and Agencies that comprise the Interagency Council.

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| <p>Chair</p>  <p>Lloyd Calderon, MA (USAF, Retired) The Chair provides overall guidance and leadership for the Interagency Veterans Advisory Council and oversees all activities and operations.</p> | <p>Vice Chair</p>  <p>Adam Anicich, MBA The Vice Chair functions as the chief operating officer and manages the day-to-day activities of the Interagency Veterans Advisory Council and its Officers.</p> |
| <p>Chief Legal and Policy Officer</p>  <p>Mary Card Mina, JD The Chief Legal and Policy Officer assists with navigating laws and policies that impact Veterans and their Families in the federal workplace. This includes supervising policy review and development, as well as providing legal advice to Interagency Veterans Officers and membership.</p> | <p>Senior Executive Advisor</p>  <p>Jack Malgeri, JD, PhD The Senior Executive Advisor provides strategic advice and technical guidance to the Interagency Veterans Executive Board and leads various projects, including seminars for federal employees and agencies on: Veterans Mental Health, USERRA, employment opportunities, and best practices in the federal workplace.</p> |
| <p>Chief Technology Officer</p>  <p>Gregory Kim, JD, MBA, MSF, CGFM The Chief Technology Officer is responsible for the development and maintenance of all websites, social media platforms, technological innovation, and architectural design. The CTO regularly consults with Officers and Members regarding technological capabilities for Veteran ERGs.</p> | <p>Chief Administrative Officer</p>  <p>Tammy McClain The Chief Administrative Officer is responsible for the direction and management of operational activities, and coordinates efforts to achieve pro-Veteran national goals related to recruiting, hiring, retention, and promotion of Veterans in the Federal workplace.</p> |
| <p>Chief Communications Officer</p>  <p>Lindan A. Moya, PhD Reaching Veterans is a difficult task, even within the Federal government. The Chief Communications Officer is responsible for coordinating the overall outreach efforts of Interagency Veterans including the production of the annual report, and using social media, surveys, newsletters, and email campaigns.</p> | <p>Chief Data Officer</p>  <p>Ryan Arbuckle, MS The Chief Data Officer is responsible for the use, collection, categorization, and synthesis of all data elements and figures. In this role, the CDO regularly consults and advises with other Interagency Veterans Officers on matters related to data, economics, and statistics.</p> |
| <p>Chief Human Performance Officer</p>  <p>Sean Green, MS, MA The Chief Human Performance Officer is responsible for providing holistic human optimization expertise for Veterans, and the greater membership community, through the use of social media, newsletters, and various other publishing and engagement strategies. This includes physical and emotional wellbeing.</p> | <p>Co-Director for Military Spouse Advocacy</p>  <p>Alissa Bookwalter, MEd The Co-Director for Military Spouse Advocacy leads Interagency Veterans’ efforts to support military spouses, Veterans’ spouses, caregivers, and survivors who are federal employees, and their families. This includes advocacy, engagement, and policy recommendations on issues affecting this demographic.</p> |

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| <p>Co-Director for Military Spouse Advocacy</p>  <p>Amy Bontrager, MS The Co-Director for Military Spouse Advocacy leads Interagency Veterans' efforts to support military spouses, Veterans' spouses, caregivers, and survivors who are federal employees, and their families. This includes advocacy, engagement, and policy recommendations on issues affecting this demographic.</p> | <p>Communications Director</p>  <p>Keisha White, BA, IS The Director of Communications functions as the design leader for all Interagency Veterans Advisory Council products and content shared government wide. Providing counsel, guidance, and design support in communications strategies and 508-compliance efforts, the director ensures all products are within compliance with Federal laws and accessible to all.</p> |
| <p>Deputy Director for Military Spouse Advocacy Engagement</p>  <p>Marquiesha Gillispie, MPA The Deputy Director for Military Spouse Advocacy Engagement is responsible for organizing and developing a worldwide network of Military Spouses, community stakeholders, and government officials. This includes creating opportunities for engagement and membership activities and supporting pro-Military Spouse and Family employee and care initiatives.</p> | <p>Deputy Director for Military Spouse Advocacy Operations</p>  <p>Kari Szakal, MA The Deputy Director for Military Spouse Advocacy Operations is responsible for coordinating and overseeing operational activities, products, deadlines, and deliverables from Interagency Veterans, The White House, and OPM. This includes recurring and ad hoc projects related to all facets of Military Spouse Advocacy.</p> |
| <p>Deputy Director for Military Spouse Advocacy Policy</p>  <p>Courtney Severino, JD The Deputy Director for Military Spouse Advocacy Policy is responsible for coordinating and developing policy positions, legislative and programmatic proposals, and policy statements related to Military Spouses and Families. This includes reviewing and drafting proposals, discussing policy matters with Interagency Veterans membership, The White House, and OPM, and supporting the Chief Legal and Policy Officer.</p> | <p>Vice Chair Emeritus</p>  <p>Walter Elmore (Retired) Walter Elmore was a founding Officer of Interagency Veterans and devoted his career to <i>Serving Those Who Served</i>. As Chair of the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Veterans Affinity Group, Walter led numerous initiatives to support homeless Veterans and underserved communities. His ideas and suggestions have materialized over multiple decades and across numerous Administrations. Although he retired from federal service in 2021, his legacy continues as the permanently appointed Vice Chair Emeritus of the Interagency Veterans Advisory Council.</p> |

Interagency Veterans Advisory Council Activities and Outreach

In 2021, Interagency Veterans sustained the virtual environment brought on by the pandemic and used video teleconferences for most meetings and events. Multiple technology platforms were also tested to improve the user experience. As a result, all of the quarterly meetings were held virtually, most outreach and operational release activities were virtual, and a large webinar was held; co-hosted by Interagency Veterans and the Office of Personnel Management.

Connect with us on [social media](#) for the latest updates, event notifications, or to share feedback about issues related to Veterans in the federal workforce.

Below are the list of activities and events that Interagency Veterans produced in 2021.²⁰

Quarterly Meetings

February 9, 2021

Introduction of New Officers, Redesigned IVAC Logo, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Office Update, VBA Benefits and Services Information Session, OPM Military Buyback Process, Operation Warfighter Fellowship Presentation, 2021 Agenda, and Chaplain's Reflection.

April 28, 2021

Keynote Speaker SEC Commissioner [Caroline Crenshaw](#) on Leadership and the Value of Executive Champions for ERGs; Keynote Speaker Congressman [Jack Bergman](#), LTG (Ret), USMC. Member, House Armed Services Committee and House Veterans Affairs Committee; SGM (Ret) [Matthew Krenz](#)²¹, Executive Director of the Enlisted Association of the National Guard – Transitioning to the Civilian Sector; Focus on Fitness: [Sean Green](#), MBA, MS – Staying Healthy and Fit During Prolonged Telework; and [Nelson Akeredolu](#), Office of Servicemember Affairs, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) – How to spot and avoid scams and frauds.

July 28, 2021

Keynote Speaker [Dr. Berlyn \(Lynn\) Cooper-Howard](#), Acting Program Director, Veterans Services, Office of Personnel Management - OPM Veterans Update; Keynote Speaker [Judge Ron Bogle](#) – National Chair, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) – Update on the ESGR; Keynote Speaker [MG Kevin McNeely](#), former [Assistant to the Chairman](#) of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; [Libby Jamison](#), Senior Advisor, Office of the First Lady of the United States: Update on the *Joining Forces* Initiative; [Justin Hart](#), Assistant National Service Director, Disabled American Veterans – DAV Update; and Reflections on 9/11's 20th Anniversary.

October 27, 2021

Introduction of New Officers and Veterans Day 2021; [Jeffrey Jack](#), Veterans Employment Program Manager, Customs and Border Protection: *CBP in Action*; [Dennis May](#), Deputy Executive Director, Center for Minority Veterans, Department of Veterans Affairs; A Day in the Life at the Secret Service: Captain [Timothy Jones](#); Keynote Speaker: [Rory Brosius](#), Executive Director, *Joining Forces*, [Office of the First Lady of the United States](#); and [Mac Tolar](#), Director, Wounded Warrior and Gold Star Fellowships, U.S. House of Representatives.

²⁰ Although this report covers fiscal year 2021, the activities and outreach section cover January 1, 2021, to Veterans Day, November 11, 2021 (the release date) since no additional activities occur within Interagency Veterans over the holidays.

²¹ Note that any references or links to non-U.S. Government websites throughout this report are only for ease of reference, and do not imply endorsement or support for the content therein.

Outreach Activities

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| Email Newsletters | Quarterly |
| Engaged New Administration | 1 st half of 2021 |
| Engaged New House and Senate Committees | 1 st half of 2021 |
| The Future Made Possible - Memorial Day in America | 5/25/2021 |
| 20 th Anniversary of 9/11 | 9/10/2021 |

Operational Releases

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| Letter to Members | 2/4/2021 |
| Master Calendar | 2/8/2021 |

Formal Events, Projects, and Webinars

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| D-Day National Service Project: Beautification of National Monuments (WWII Memorial for those in Washington, D.C.) | 6/6/2021 |
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| Webinar Co-Hosted with OPM: Enhancing Veterans' Mental Health in the Federal Workplace | 9/21/2021 |
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This was a 90-minute moderated panel discussion on Enhancing Veterans' Mental Health in the Federal Workplace. Topics included Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), suicide prevention, workplace strategies for promoting psychological wellbeing, and resources for families of Veterans dealing with suicide and mental health challenges. Featuring clinical and academic leaders from Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Sapien Labs, and Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), this session focused on the trauma and resiliency that individuals encounter, mental health improvement, resources available, and how this all overlaps into the federal workplace. Brief opening remarks were heard from Interagency Veterans Chair **Lloyd Calderon** and OPM Veterans Program Director **Lynn Cooper-Howard**.

Expert panelists included: **Paula Schnurr, PhD** – Executive Director, National Center for PTSD, Department of Veterans Affairs; **Stephanie Gamble, PhD** – Associate Director, Suicide Prevention Program, Department of Veterans Affairs; **Tara Thiagarajan, PhD** – Founder and Chief Scientist, Sapien Labs; **Kim Burditt, MSW** – Senior Manager, TAPS Suicide Postvention; and was moderated by **Jack Malgeri, JD, PhD** - Senior HR Program Advisor, U.S. Secret Service.

Recording link: <https://seegov.webex.com/seegov/ldr.php?RCID=e73d07194fb3b55ff7e2a7e8d127d403>
Password: **QdZRCj4y**

Partnerships

Multiple partnership opportunities were discussed within Interagency Veterans during the year, and two were unanimously agreed to be aligned with the mission and of benefit to the membership. These two partnership collaborations are outlined below.

Future partnerships will continue to be explored, and the foundational criteria in evaluating whether to move forward or not is the benefit to Interagency Veterans membership by 1) Espousing mutual goals and objectives, 2) Aligning with the theme of continued service to others, and 3) Providing opportunity to advance a pro-Veteran agenda within the federal government.

The First Lady's Joining Forces

"We have an all-volunteer force—and it continues only because generations of Americans see the honor, dignity, and patriotism of military service. How can we hope to keep our military strong if we don't give our families, survivors, and caregivers what they need to thrive? That's what Joining Forces is about."

- First Lady Dr. Jill Biden



Joining Forces is a White House initiative, led by the Office of the First Lady to support families of Servicemembers and Veterans, their caregivers and survivors. The work and priorities of *Joining Forces* centers on the needs of military families in the areas of: **Employment and Entrepreneurship; Military Child Education; and Health and Well-Being.**

Recognizing the unique challenges that military and Veteran families, caregivers, and survivors face when navigating the federal hiring landscape and access to resources for advancement and career continuity as federal employees, Joining Forces has partnered with Interagency Veterans to establish an enduring community for military spouses, by military spouses. This community is inclusive of all levels of civilian service (including executives), with a strong emphasis on advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility through advocacy, engagement, and policy development. Organizational goals will be to establish and promote the following:

- Development of a listserv for cross-agency collaboration and connections
- Advance awareness of the existing Military Spouse Non-competitive Appointing Authority (Executive Order 13473²²)
- Facilitate the sharing of hiring and retention best practices across agencies
- Establish a mentorship program, develop, and launch pulse surveys, and conduct fireside chats
- Provide a community offering networking and professional development opportunities

Interagency Veterans looks forward to the new partnership with Joining Forces. In the coming years, we will build and champion an effort that seeks to make an impact in the lives of federal employees who are military and Veteran families, caregivers, and survivors. In turn, we hope to provide the federal workforce with enduring resources for some of the best and brightest talent in government.

²² See Presidential Documents in the Federal Register at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2008-09-30/pdf/E8-23125.pdf>.

The Office of Personnel Management’s Veterans Services Office

In 2021, Interagency Veterans sought out guidance and advice from OPM’s Veterans Services Office²³ on multiple occasions, and invited their leadership to speak at multiple events, including quarterly meetings.

Understanding that their office has been actively working to support Veterans in the policy space and coordinating with Departments and Agencies on Veteran-specific topics, Interagency Veterans recognizes their contributions to Veteran employees, and is appreciative for their efforts.

After multiple collaborative efforts, Interagency Veterans approached the Veterans Services Office about co-sponsoring a Veterans mental health webinar. This co-sponsored event was titled Enhancing Veterans’ Mental Health in the Federal Workforce and was viewed by over 700 Federal employees.

Interagency Veterans looks forward to collaborating with OPM’s Office of Veterans Services more in the future and will happily provide support as requested.



THE INTERAGENCY VETERANS ADVISORY COUNCIL AND OPM’S OFFICE OF VETERANS SERVICES PRESENT

ENHANCING VETERANS’ MENTAL HEALTH IN THE FEDERAL WORKPLACE

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21ST | 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

The Interagency Veterans Advisory Council invites you to a 90-minute moderated panel discussion on Enhancing Veterans’ Mental Health in the Federal Workplace. Topics include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), suicide prevention, workplace strategies for promoting psychological wellbeing, and resources for families of Veterans dealing with suicide and mental health challenges.

Featuring clinical and academic leaders from Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Sapien Labs, and Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), this engaging session will focus on the trauma and resiliency that individuals encounter, mental health improvement, resources available, and how this all overlaps into the federal workplace.

Expert panelists include:

Paula Schnurr, PhD – Executive Director, National Center for PTSD, Department of Veterans Affairs

Stephanie Gamble, PhD – Associate Director, Suicide Prevention Program, Department of Veterans Affairs

Tara Thiagarajan, PhD – Founder and Chief Scientist, Sapien Labs

Kim Burditt, MSW – Senior Manager, TAPS Suicide Postvention

Moderated by:

Jack Malgeri, JD, PhD – Senior HR Program Advisor, U.S. Secret Service



Interagency
Veterans
Advisory
Council

²³ See <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/veterans-services/>.

Best Practices for Employee Resource Groups

Best practices for ERGs generally consist of multi-faceted engagement approaches and a well-organized administrative architecture. More fundamentally, ERGs that provide opportunities for professional growth and development, networking amongst peers, and a service-oriented mission tend to attract more engaged members. Incremental implementation of improvements can also have a positive impact on both the size of the ERG and its community impact.

Mission/Goals/Focus on Service to Others

ERGs with a strong mission and goals that focus on service to others have historically been more sustainable over the long term and provide an outlet for employees to utilize their skills for the benefit of others. In the military and Veterans communities, service to others is a foundational element that attracts others interested in altruistic goals.

Regular Meetings

Many ERGs report one of the most challenging aspects of organizing membership is the production of meetings. The challenges of finding guest speakers, determining content, and sharing with the membership is time consuming. While there is an element of investment in the time it takes to organize and produce a meeting, having regularly scheduled meetings (quarterly at 12 noon on the 2nd Wednesday, for example) that recur on everyone's calendars is helpful to alleviate scheduling concerns. It also demonstrates a level organizational maturity that eases in identifying speakers. Also, ERG staff can support by providing suggestions to leadership for topics and raise issues amongst the group in a safe setting.

Virtual Engagement and Regional Support

The pandemic has illustrated the need for virtual inclusion options, and the same is true for ERGs. ERGs that support virtual engagement (meetings, events, and activities) tend to attract larger audiences and create climates where geographically diversified employees can converge in a virtual setting. This not only increases the participation base, but also allows members to interact with others from across the organization, and not just within their own divisions/offices.

The other aspect is creating events that are regional or decentralized in nature, so that ERG members from across the country can participate. This may take the form of area beautification at the local VA National Cemetery or encouraging members to volunteer at their local city or county Veterans' offices. One example is developing an organization-wide/Agency event for a 9/11 Remembrance that is held live at headquarters in DC, and broadcast virtually to staff around the country. Following the event, ERG members can be encouraged to participate in the National Day of Service within their communities... and share pictures and narratives from the event with ERG leadership. This activity not only creates an opportunity to serve, but also allows the ERG leadership to showcase member accomplishments.

Multiple Leadership Positions

Many ERGs, even in large Agencies, have only one of two Officer positions. These individuals are often highly charismatic and have the capabilities of leading and organizing large ERG membership groups. However, this posture limits growth and potential of both the ERG and its individual members. By developing and recruiting additional ERG members into leadership roles (Director, subcommittee chair, recruitment manager, etc.), it creates opportunity for professional development of members and creates a

pipeline of supportive employees. Additionally, individuals who are given leadership roles are more invested in the larger ERG and often rise to the demands of the role. The ERG's sustainability is improved when multiple leadership positions exist, drawn from a range of grade levels, from across the organization.

Email Distribution Lists

A simple best practice is the development of an email distribution list. This may take the form of a monitored listserv where members can self-manage their notifications or may simply be an excel document that maintains the email addresses of the Department or Agency's ERG members. This list can be leveraged to disseminate information and scheduled communications to members and can be used as the basic for calendar invites to ERG events and activities.

Executive Sponsors and Champions

Having a champion for the ERG at a senior level (SES or GS-15) allows for the ERG to be represented and advocated for with other senior staff at the Agency²⁴, provides for mentorship and coaching, and serve as a sounding board for issues and recommendations.²⁵

²⁴ NASA's Guidance for Developing Effective Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) at https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/erg_guidance_7-17-13.pdf.

²⁵ Internal Revenue Service's Employee Organization and Employee Resource Group Policy at <https://www.mos-irs.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2018-Employee-Organization-and-Employee-Resource-Group-Policy.pdf>.

Veterans Employee Resource Groups: Highlights from Around the Government

Agencies were asked to submit narrative descriptions to share in the Annual Report that highlighted the good work and efforts of their membership or Agencies. Below is a compendium of narratives²⁶ that have been received from all over government and showcase²⁷ the myriad of communities that take part in supporting America's Veterans.

AmeriCorps Focuses on Mil-Vet Community

AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers serve directly with nonprofit organizations to tackle our nation's most pressing challenges. Every year, we enroll more than 270,000 individuals to serve organizations making a difference in communities across America.

This year, AmeriCorps focused on redeveloping and rebranding the Mil-Vet Community and worked to educate colleagues on military and Veteran issues, while continuing to focus on employment and retention. Sadly, because of COVID, the in-person events in 2021 were limited in numbers, but virtual engagement continued strong!

Veterans Speak about Rough Start to Federal Employment at the Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

Prior to the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity's (ODME) holding a *Veterans Listening Session* on April 21, 2021, many Veterans thought their experience as newly hired federal employees was an isolated occurrence – enduring hazing and bullying behaviors from seasoned federal employees. However, during the listening session, it was surprising to learn that other Veterans shared some of the following experiences as new hires that created for them a perceived hostile work environment towards preference-eligible Veterans: negative public comments about Veterans in the workplace, minimization of military service, and comments that Veterans' preference was an easy way to "sneak in" the government.

ODME's second annual *Veterans Listening Session* focused on workplace matters that directly affect Veterans and Military Families at ACF. The virtual meeting format provided Veteran community stakeholders with an opportunity to assist in identifying constructive solutions that could enhance the recruitment, retention, and advancement of Veterans throughout ACF. In total, 68 ACF Veteran community stakeholders participated in the listening session.

Stephanie Davis from ODME moderated the event and posed several thought-provoking questions to the group, including "What type of initiatives and/or efforts do you feel are needed to promote Veterans integration at ACF?" Many of the Veterans responded that work environments fostering acceptance and inclusion for newly hired Veterans should be a priority.

Several Veterans provided specific examples of how their onboarding and early employment periods were marred by hazing and bullying tactics from their supervisors and co-workers – based on the premise that Veterans preference allows unqualified Veterans into jobs that are more appropriate for non-military, "better" qualified applicants. This attitude towards Veterans seemed prevalent despite the fact that

²⁶ Listed in chronological order as received, then by alphabetical order, by name of component, as self-reported in the submission. Submissions were self-certified as approved to publish by the submitter. Content and claims made within are the sole responsibility of the submitter and were self-certified as accurate by the submitter.

²⁷ Any images provided were previously placed in the public domain by a U.S Government entity or were provided by membership with the explicit intention and understanding of publishing in the Annual Report.

Veterans only make up about seven percent (7%) of ACF's total workforce. These comments of hazing and bullying reminded many in the audience of the struggles encountered during the Civil Rights Era and helped focused the conversation on solutions.

ODME provides Veterans and other Employee Resources Groups (ERGs) with a work environment that values diversity and equality and is working with ACF Veterans to create an environment that promotes acceptance and inclusion for **all** employees at ACF. The *Veteran Listening Sessions* are a valuable tool that assist ACF leadership with ensuring that everyone's voices are heard, and that everyone has a fair and equal opportunity at a successful career with the federal government.

Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) Veterans Assisting Veterans Continues Strong in 2021

DIA's Veterans Assisting Veterans (VAV) has been continuing strong through the pandemic, including by keeping their Veterans updated with continuous email messaging such as "News You Could Use" from VA, updates on the availability of COVID-19 vaccines, working with local counties to disseminate vaccine information, and sharing VA Inspector General Reports and Interagency Veterans News.

DIA also hosted the VA's Office of the Secretary - Center for the Minority Veterans (CMV) and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) for an agency-wide *Lunch and Learn* held in November 2020. The event provided their Veterans community with up-to-date information on programs provided by the VA. Another similar event is anticipated in November of 2021.

DOI Vets Celebrates over 2,000 Active Members

The Department of the Interior Veterans ERG – DOI Vets – recently surpassed a milestone: over 2,000 active DOI Vets Members! DOI Vets works to keep Veterans informed and strengthen the ERG relevance by seeking best methods in communications and supporting Veterans to make their lives better through meaningful employment.

DOI Vets recently partnered with *Connections* magazine, where Veterans are profiled with the issues' monthly theme. *Connections* magazine is published by the Deputy Assistant Secretary – Administrative Services and the Director, Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights at DOI.

Each year, DOI Vets honors the fallen with their virtual Memorial Day **Wall of Honor** – images and stories shared by DOI employees about their loved ones.



Internal Revenue Service Military Outreach for Service (MOS) Leads Agency in Supporting Veterans

The **Military Outreach for Service (MOS)** is an employee resource group officially associated the Internal Revenue Service, with membership open to active and retired federal employees and federal contractors with any U.S. government agency whose primary focus is improving the lives of veterans, no matter if active, retired, or previously separated.

IRS MOS took special focus in further maturing its Veterans Community of Practice, outreach, and communications with its members. Over the past two years, IRS MOS has redesigned its website, created, and validated an electronic tracking system for its membership, began sending regular newsletters to its membership, and updated its national by-laws; preparing it for a dynamic future in FY22.

Additionally, IRS MOS hosted multiple Veteran Virtual Training Workshops in support of the professional development of Veterans, including lunch-n-learns, town halls, workshops, and employee forums.

Veterans Day Virtual Celebration Program: The IRS and MOS hosted a Veterans Day Virtual Celebration Program Webcast. Speakers included the IRS Commissioner and Dr. Paul R. Lawrence, Undersecretary for Benefits, Veterans Benefits Administration. This in virtual event attended by the IRS Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners and had over 833 attendees. This event included a slide show with pictures of IRS veterans.

Department of Labor's Military Veterans Alliance (MVA) Continues Strong

The Military Veterans Alliance (MVA) is a US Department of Labor (DOL) Affinity Group. It serves as a platform where veteran employees can network and form collaborative relationships by sharing knowledge and understanding of different cultures and life experiences. Its goals include enhancing recruiting and retention efforts, acting as an information resource for veterans and DOL functions, and supporting diversity and inclusiveness.

Monthly meetings are held every third Wednesday of the month and feature relevant presentations for our members. This has included presentations on VA Benefits and Services, Military Buy-Back Program, Service Computation Date, Disabled Veterans Leave, Suicide Intervention Skills, Water Safety and Preventing Drownings, DOL Mentoring Program (and Veterans Mentoring Program), the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), Operation Warfighter, Vets4Warriors, American Legion, Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), and the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). This has enabled it to increase membership and overall participation.

Every year two ceremonies are planned and organized recognizing veterans. The first is the annual Fallen Comrade Ceremony held in honor of Memorial Day. The second is the annual Veterans Memorial Service and Wreath Laying Ceremony which is held in honor of Veterans Day in the DOL Veterans Park which is adjacent to the Department of Labor's main building. These are well-attended events which are supported by the Secretary of Labor and other dignitaries.

In addition, MVA continues to expand its community service efforts. For example, it has been involved with the Soldiers' Angels Adopt-A-Family Program for the holidays and has supported a family the last two years. Another example is support of the annual Winterhaven Homeless Veterans Stand Down at the Washington, DC VA Medical Center. This involves providing supplies and services to homeless veterans such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, and VA benefits counseling.

MVA has an outstanding leadership team whose dedication, professionalism, and many efforts have led to improvements in its mission of supporting veterans. This includes Michael Campbell, President; Heidi Ortiz, Secretary; Jonathan Chudson, Treasurer; Larry Wickliffe, Sergeant at Arms; and Sheila Bartlett, Soldiers' Angels Coordinator. Also, MVA appreciates the ongoing support of Mark Toal, Director, Office of Strategic Outreach; Kris Rick, SGM, US Army, Sergeant Major of the Army Senior Fellow; and Randy Smith, HIRE Vets Medallion Program Director, of the Veterans' Employment and Training Services (VETS), DOL.



Department of Labor launches Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot for Veterans

The Department of Labor’s **Veterans’ Employment and Training Service’s (VETS) *Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot*** provides one-on-one career assistance to transitioning service members, and their spouses, at select military installations worldwide. The support complements the department’s Transition Assistance Program’s classroom instruction.

Partner organizations’ support will include apprenticeship opportunities, hiring events, digital matching of skills and experiences, employment mentorship and networking with organizations committed to employing veterans, employment referrals and placement, workforce training, and wrap around services within communities for additional support services. VETS selected organizations experienced in providing employment and training services to transitioning service members and their spouses.

Employment Navigators are located at U.S. Army, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force installations in the U.S. and overseas to provide one-on-one employment assistance to transitioning service members, and their spouses. Based on an individual’s needs, Employment Navigators connect them with partner organizations for additional employment services to aid their transition.

NIH Veteran Deploys to Southern Border on Humanitarian Mission



First Sergeant (retired) Gerard Roman never imagined that he would be deployed again after retiring from the Army. As the Principal Strategist for the Hispanic Portfolio at the National Institutes of Health, he spends his days championing diversity, equity, and inclusion, and focuses his efforts on creating opportunities within NIH. However, in 2021 Gerard answered the call to deploy to the Southern Border in support of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Unaccompanied Children Mission.

“The detail was by far the most rewarding experience I had in my 21-year career as a federal employee. I had the opportunity to work with the mental health team evaluating the needs of unaccompanied undocumented children and will always remember their stories and difficult situations. I was particularly captivated by their humbleness, humility, culture, and background. I’m so grateful to the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Health and Human Services for giving me such opportunity to serve. The mission reminded the time that I did in the U.S. Army, which is for me has been the greatest honor of my life.” said Roman.



Many of the children Roman helped during the deployment drew pictures for him as a way of saying “thank you” for his efforts.

Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of Housing Counseling Focuses on Veterans

HUD’s Office of Housing Counseling will begin FY22 with a focus on working with military Servicemembers, their families and Veterans.



In June of 2021, the HUD Office of Housing Counseling presented a National Homeownership Month training webinar on "Housing Protection for Servicemembers" for housing counselors. The webinar

featured housing counseling industry speakers including Connie Der Torossian and Thomas Griffin, with USA Homeownership Foundation, Inc., Tara Alderete, of Money Management International and LaDonna Cruse, from Virginia Housing. David Berenbaum, Deputy Assistant Secretary in HUD’s Office of Housing Counseling (OHC) provided opening remarks as well. Over 80 housing counseling agency managers and housing counselors attended. A lively question and answer session followed the presentation with audience questions focused on helping the families of active-duty military service members.

National Technical Information Service (NTIS) helps transitioning Veterans successfully launch into Industry Careers

NTIS is a small agency within the Department of Commerce of about 40 government full-time equivalents (FTEs), so they have been utilizing the Operation Warfighter Fellowship program from the Department of Defense to attract Service Members to support the NTIS mission prior to their medical retirement, and then have found good-paying jobs in the civilian sector – all related to the work they did at NTIS.



“NTIS has benefited from the efforts and expertise that these Service Members bring to the OWF Fellowship, and the fellows gain specific industry experience related to the work NTIS performs. We have been thrilled to learn that many of these fellows end up with lucrative positions in the private sector after they leave the OWF program.” said Randy Caldwell, Chief of Staff at NTIS. Caldwell further remarked: “We are glad to have been able to play a small part in their military transition journey.”

Learn more about NTIS at www.ntis.gov.

Transition Assistance Programs (TAP) Continues Strong

The Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011²⁸ mandated that transitioning service members participate in the three-day TAP Employment Workshop. In 2018, 160,000 transitioning veterans participated (DOL, 2021).

On August 13, 2018, President Trump signed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) which requires the Department of Defense (DOD) to provide individualized pre-separation counseling no later than 365 days before a service member’s release from the service and requires the transitioning veteran to take employment-related courses provided by VETS.

TAP programs are available online at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/tap>.

Department of Labor’s Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG)

The JVSG program provides funding to states for Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans’ Employment Representative (LVER) staff. DVOP specialists provide individualized career services to veterans with significant barriers to employment.

In 2018, nearly 80,000 veterans were assisted by DVOP specialists. LVER staff promote veteran hiring through outreach activities that build relationships with local employers.

²⁸ See Title II of Public Law 112-56, at <https://www.congress.gov/112/plaws/publ56/PLAW-112publ56.pdf>.

Veterans@State Supports its nearly 7,000 Members

Formed in 2014, Veterans@State is the newest employee affinity group at the Department of State and adds to the agency's diverse and inclusive workforce by highlighting the unique skillsets, backgrounds, and esprit de corps that our approximately 7,000 Veteran employees (which includes civil service (CS), foreign service (FS), personal services contractors (PSCs), and third-party contractors (TPCs) offer worldwide.

Our mission includes:

Serve as a professional association that supports our Veterans in the Department; Serve as a formal link between our Veterans, the Secretary's Office of Civil Rights, HR staff, and senior management; Serve as a coordinating body between Veterans in the Department and external organizations.

Priority Areas for 2021-2022 include: Veterans/Military HR Issues (e.g., military buyback, disability rights, USERRA) and Professional Development (e.g., mentoring, networking).

Some of the events held in 2021 include:

- Schedule A Hiring Brown Bag
- Virtual Happy Hours and Trivia
- Veterans@State Board Meetings
- Veterans@State and DAG PTS Peer Support Group
- Lunch and Learn event with A/GIS
- Veterans *Roll Call*
- SES Prep brown bag kickoff
- Veterans@State Coffee Chats
- Membership check-ins

See more about the ways in which Veterans@State honors our Veteran employees at <https://www.state.gov/dipnote-u-s-department-of-state-official-blog/diversity-and-diplomacy-honoring-our-veteran-workforce/>.

Veterans Employment

Veteran Employment in the Federal Workplace

Veterans make up approximately 31% of the federal workforce²⁹, and work at virtually every Department and Agency.

Looking at the federal landscape, Veterans contribute to nearly every career field and occupation. It is important to note that many of the programs, services, issues, and policies apply to Veterans and non-Veterans equally – while some have a disparate impact on Veterans. For the purposes of this section, we looked at topics and issues that are specific to Veterans and included statistics about Veterans without reference to non-Veterans.

This section primarily provides an analysis and review of the major findings from the recent 2020 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report to the Congress focusing on Veteran federal employment and the subsequent retention rates among Veterans. Not only does the GAO report highlight the differences between Veterans and non-Veterans but it also makes recommendations to federal agencies to help address these differences. Overall, the largest area of focus, and takeaway presented below, is the identification of six contributing factors that both veteran and non-veterans identified as considerations for them leaving their current agency.

As Veterans make up approximately one-third the federal workforce, it is important to understand these issues and increase retention within this group, where possible. Improving Veteran retention would lead to increased productivity within the Department or Agency.³⁰

Distribution and Demographics of Veterans in Federal Workplace

Over 600,000 Veterans are employed by the federal government, and that's a number that has grown over the last five years of available data (Fiscal Years 2014-2018). The below chart³¹ shows the total number of On-Board Employees, Veterans, Veterans with Preference, Disabled Veterans, and 30% or More Disabled Veterans.

As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have slowed and ended, the surge of Servicemembers once required in the military is lower than it once was, and those individuals are finding employment in the federal government as seen below. Of note is the increased numbers (both as a percentage and in quantity) of disabled Veterans joining the federal workforce.

²⁹ OPM Celebrates American Heroes on July 28, 2021, at <https://www.opm.gov/blogs/Director/federal-workforce/>.

³⁰ Such as the eliminated costs of rehiring for the position, or the reduced costs associated with training and onboarding new employees.

³¹ OPM. (2020, November). *Employment of Veterans in the Federal Executive Branch*. <https://www.fedshirevets.gov/veterans-council/veteran-employment-data/employment-of-veterans-in-the-federal-executive-branch-fy2018.pdf> (Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number for simplicity)

| Total On-Board Employees as of September 2018 | | | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Category | FY 2014 | FY 2015 | FY 2016 | FY 2017 | FY 2018 |
| Total Employees | 1,990,033 | 2,016,370 | 2,042,669 | 2,034,269 | 2,047,514 |
| Total Veterans | 612,661 | 623,762 | 635,556 | 633,386 | 634,217 |
| % of All Employees | 31% | 31% | 31% | 31% | 31% |
| Veterans with Preference | 516,075 | 531,988 | 544,178 | 543,916 | 546,399 |
| % of All Employees | 26% | 26% | 27% | 27% | 27% |
| % of All Veterans | 84% | 85% | 86% | 86% | 86% |
| Disabled Veterans | 226,013 | 243,176 | 259,238 | 273,428 | 293,198 |
| % of All Employees | 11% | 12% | 13% | 13% | 14% |
| % of All Veterans | 37% | 39% | 41% | 43% | 46% |
| 30% or more Disabled Veterans | 132,434 | 146,872 | 161,052 | 172,882 | 186,602 |
| % of All Employees | 7% | 7% | 8% | 8% | 9% |
| % of All Veterans | 22% | 24% | 25% | 27% | 29% |

The below table³² is a snapshot from the most recently available data (Fiscal Year 2018) and provides information on the demographics of Veterans in the federal workforce.

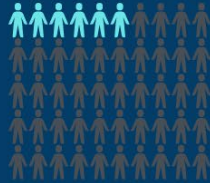
Of note is the fact that Veterans are represented in the Senior Executive Service (SES) at half the rate of their non-Veteran counterparts. Additional detail on Veterans in the SES/SL ranks can be found in the [Recommendations](#) section.

| Demographic | Veteran | Non-veteran |
|---------------------------------------|---------|-------------------------|
| Gender (percent Male) | 80% | 46% |
| Average Age | 49 | 46 |
| Race | | |
| <i>White</i> | 63% | 62% |
| <i>Black</i> | 20% | 17% |
| <i>Hispanic</i> | 9% | 9% |
| <i>Asian/Pacific Islander</i> | 4% | 8% |
| <i>Native American/Alaskan Native</i> | 1% | 2% |
| Retired Military | | |
| <i>Enlisted</i> | 20% | <i>(not applicable)</i> |
| <i>Officer</i> | 6% | <i>(not applicable)</i> |
| <i>Not Retired</i> | 74% | <i>(not applicable)</i> |
| Bachelor's degree or Higher | 43% | 56% |
| Supervisors | 13% | 12% |
| Senior Executive Service (SES) | .2% | .4% |

³² OPM. (2020, November). *Employment of Veterans in the Federal Executive Branch*. <https://www.fedshirevets.gov/veterans-council/veteran-employment-data/employment-of-veterans-in-the-federal-executive-branch-fy2018.pdf> (Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number for simplicity)

Veteran Statistics: Employment

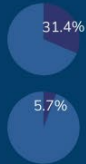
Approximately 200,000 service members transition from military service to civilian life each year



In November 2009, Executive Order 13518 created the Veterans Employment Initiative and the Council on Veterans Employment to increase the employment of veterans in the federal government (Executive Order No. 13518, 2009)

As a result, the federal government has established programs to facilitate the hiring, placement, retention and advancement of veterans

Veterans in the federal Government



In calendar year 2019, veterans made up 5.7 percent of the civilian labor force, ages 18 and over. In Calendar year 2018 Veterans made up 31.4% of all federal employees.

Veterans in the working population



1.6X
Veterans resigned from federal service at 1.6 times the rate of similar non-Veterans.



7.6% HHS VETERAN WORKFORCE

Health and Human Services had the Lowest veteran workforce as a percentage of staff at 7.6%



47.2% DEFENSE VETERAN WORKFORCE

Defense had the highest veteran workforce as a percentage of staff at 47.2%

The challenge of beginning a new career is a pressing obstacle facing new veterans, and improving veteran transition programs is a public priority. Even the agency with the lowest veteran participation is much higher than the overall civilian workforce of ages 18 and older. This shows veteran programs to employee veterans are working.

Learn more at Government Accountability office, report GAO-20-592, GAO VETERAN FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran Retention Rates and FedSHireVets Labor statistics found at <https://www.fedshirevets.gov/veterans-council/veteran-employment-data/employment-of-veterans-in-the-federal-executive-branch-fy2018.pdf>

Summary of Veteran Employment Statistics in the Federal Workforce ^{33 34 35 36}

- Approximately 200,000 Servicemembers transition from military service to civilian life each year.
- Veterans represent 31 percent of employees within the Federal Executive Branch.
- 79 percent of Veteran employment within the Executive Branch is found within three agencies: Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and Department of Homeland Security.
- There is a wide distribution of Veteran employment by agency, ranging from 7.6 percent to 47.2 percent.
- In 2018, female Veteran employment within the Executive Branch increased 0.3 percent while non-Veteran female employment remained constant.

³³ GAO. (2019, July). *Transitioning Servicemembers: Information on Military Employment Assistance Centers* (GAO-19-438R).

<https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-438r>.

³⁴ OPM. (2020, November). *Employment of Veterans in the Federal Executive Branch*.

<https://www.fedshirevets.gov/veterans->

A review of OPM’s findings³⁷ shows that some Departments and Agencies employ very high percentages of Veterans, while others employ very low percentages of Veterans. The reasons and causes for these differences in percentage vary greatly, but generally the relevancy of a Veteran’s professional or trade experience relative to the Department or Agency’s business line operations, the organizational culture of the Department or Agency, and the Veterans’ perception of the organizations’ missions’ alignment with the Veteran’s personal values and interests are primary contributing factors.

Percent of Employees who are Veterans:

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| Defense: | 47.2% |
| Transportation: | 36.7% |
| Veterans Affairs: | 31.8% |
| OPM: | 28.3% |
| Education: | 11.5% |
| Environmental Protection Agency: | 8.8% |
| National Science Foundation: | 8.5% |
| Health and Human Services: | 7.6% |

Government Accountability Office 2020 Study – Veteran vs. Non-veteran Attrition

The purpose of this GAO report was to inform the Congress about concerns about retention and job satisfaction of newly hired Veterans. This was exemplified by each of the 24 Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Act agencies experiencing higher rates of attrition among Veteran employees, when compared to similar non-Veteran employees³⁸. This attrition rate, including transfers between federal agencies, ranged from .05 percent to 5.1 percent for the fiscal years 2014 through 2018³⁹.

GAO also estimated that 18.7 percent of Veterans resigned within their first 5 years of federal service compared to 11.1 percent of similar non-Veterans⁴⁰. It is unclear what influences this factor, but additional research is needed in this area. Veterans can also have longer periods of federal service, as the Veteran’s military service period can count towards total leave and retirement eligibility, under certain circumstances, if bought-back via Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) deposit credit⁴¹. This allows eligible Veterans to retire faster than non-Veterans. In fact, GAO noted that between 2014 and 2018, the Veteran retirement rate was .6 percent higher than non-Veterans⁴².

[council/veteran-employment-data/employment-of-veterans-in-the-federal-executive-branch-fy2018.pdf](https://www.fedshirevets.gov/veterans-council/veteran-employment-data/employment-of-veterans-in-the-federal-executive-branch-fy2018.pdf).

³⁵ GAO. (July, 2020). *OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran retention Rates*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-592.pdf>.

³⁶ GAO. (July, 2020). *OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran retention Rates*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-592.pdf>.

³⁷ OPM. (2020, November). *Employment of Veterans in the Federal Executive Branch*. <https://www.fedshirevets.gov/veterans-council/veteran-employment-data/employment-of-veterans-in-the-federal-executive-branch-fy2018.pdf>.

³⁸ GAO. (July, 2020). *OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran retention Rates*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-592.pdf>.

³⁹ GAO. (July, 2020). *OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran retention Rates*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-592.pdf>.

⁴⁰ GAO. (July, 2020). *OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran retention Rates*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-592.pdf>.

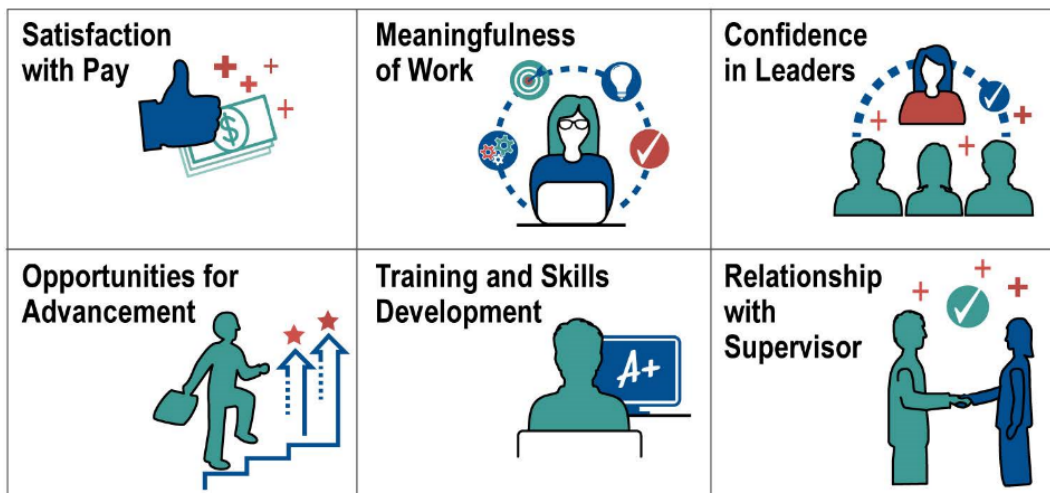
⁴¹ See OPM Retirement Services FERS Information at <https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/fers-information/creditable-service/>.

⁴² GAO. (July, 2020). *OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran retention Rates*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-592.pdf>.

After controlling for key demographic and employment factors, GAO estimated that on average, 6.7 percent of Veterans left the federal government compared to 5 percent of similar non-Veterans⁴³. While Veterans primarily left to retire, Veterans resigned from federal service at 1.6 times the rate of similar non-Veterans.

The higher Veteran attrition rate highlights the need for both interagency and intra-agency action. Federal agencies should look to leverage lessons learned and best practices so that Departments and Agencies can improve attrition rates among Veterans. This can be done by addressing the six possible reasons, identified through the GAO report and in Table 1 below, that both Veteran and non-Veteran federal employees indicated as material factors in their decision to consider leaving federal service.

These factors, while not causal to the higher attrition rates for Veterans, may help explain some of the difference, and improvements in these areas may help lower attrition and improve overall retention of Veteran employees. Additional detail can be found in the [Employment Areas of Focus and Opportunities for Improvement](#) section.



Source: GAO analysis of 2017 Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey data. | GAO-20-592

⁴³ GAO. (July, 2020). *OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran retention Rates*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-592.pdf>.

Table 1. Workplace Factors That May Lead to Veteran Attrition⁴⁴

| Contributing Factor | Satisfied Veterans Were | Recommendation |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Satisfaction with Pay | 3.8 percentage points less likely to consider leaving federal service than veterans who were dissatisfied with their pay. | Agencies could use special payment authorities as retention incentives to make themselves more competitive in recruiting and retaining employees. |
| Meaningfulness of Work | 3.2 percentage points less likely, on average, to consider leaving federal service. | Agencies should look to include employees as part of the decision-making process and establish a connection between individual performance and the overall success of the agency. |
| Confidence in Leaders | 3.2 percentage points less likely, on average, to consider leaving federal service. | As part of agency communication, it is important that leaders set the direction, pace, and tone, and provide a clear, consistent rationale that brings Veterans and other employees along. |
| Opportunities for Advancement | 3.1 percentage points less likely to consider leaving federal service. | Agencies should look to ensure that there are upward and lateral mobility opportunities as these are important for retaining employees. Agencies can use details and rotations to meet employees' desire for mobility while also ensure that the agency mission is achieved. |
| Training and Skill Development | 2.5 percentage points less likely, on average, to consider leaving federal service than veterans with negative views in this area. | Agencies should look to increase training and development programs as a means to assist an agency in achieving its mission and goals through the improvement of individuals. |
| Relationship with Supervisors | 2.2 percentage points less likely to consider leaving federal service than veterans who did not report positive supervisor relationships | Agencies should look to ensure that Supervisors provide regular performance feedback to employees that can help sustain and improve the individual performance of the employee. |

As outlined in the GAO report, federal agencies should look to collaborate and share data surrounding retention programs and other retention best practices, especially when it comes to Veteran employment. This would allow agencies to utilize the institutional knowledge and best practices from across government, and potentially lead to their lower attrition rates of Veteran employees.

Data from the OPM Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS)⁴⁵ could be shared to highlight and identify the key factors that are leading to Veteran attrition at both an agency level and at the federal government-wide level. Additionally, this data can help highlight areas of inequity within Veteran hiring and retention activities so that Departments and Agencies can increase efforts to not only retain their Veteran workforce, but also focus on increasing diversity within their Veteran workforce.

Next Steps – Moving Towards Understanding and Change

As federal agencies look to improve the retention and hiring of Veterans, there is an ever-increasing need for collaboration and communication. The recommendation from GAO surrounding the sharing of information and best practices between federal agencies is one way to help agencies understand metrics that could be used to improve retention and overall hiring for veterans.

To begin with, federal agencies can look to partner with OPM and review the FEVS annual surveys to collect qualitative data that can be used to identify the factors, similar to the six identified by GAO, that the agency could look to improve upon. OPM could then identify Departments and Agencies that are doing well in those categories and promulgate best practices for discussion and comment.

⁴⁴ GAO. (July 2020). *OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran Retention Rates*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-592.pdf>.

⁴⁵ See <https://www.opm.gov/fevs/> for additional information on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.

Interagency Veterans remains supportive of, and prepared to assist, OPM and other federal agencies to help improve the identification and resolution of factors that are negatively impacting Veteran hiring and retention. While some of these factors, such as satisfaction with pay, might be more difficult to improve in the short term, Departments and Agencies should strive to better understand the root causes of dissatisfaction specific to their organizations, so that solutions can be developed in an effective and efficient manner.

The GAO report and identified factors are discussed in greater detail in the [Employment Areas of Focus and Opportunities for Improvement](#) section.

Veteran and Spouse Preferences

The federal government works hard to identify and recruit the best and the brightest to serve as civil servants. One of the largest government-wide preferences is the Veteran's preference program.⁴⁶

Since the time of the Civil War, veterans of the Armed Forces have been given some degree of preference in appointments to federal jobs. Recognizing their sacrifice, Congress enacted laws to prevent Veterans seeking Federal employment from being penalized for their time in military service. Veterans' preference recognizes the economic loss suffered by citizens who have served their country in uniform, restores veterans to a favorable competitive position for Government employment, and acknowledges the larger obligation owed to disabled Veterans.⁴⁷

While a number of preferences are available to a range of applicants, this section will only focus on preference-eligible Veterans and Spouses.

Veterans Preference

Veterans' preference is the method by which Veterans are given additional points or non-competitive avenues in order to apply and obtain federal civilian positions.

To receive preference, a Veteran must have been discharged or released from active duty in the Armed Forces under honorable conditions (i.e., with an honorable or general discharge). As defined in 5 U.S.C. 2101(2), "Armed Forces" means the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. The Veteran must also be eligible under one of the preference categories listed on the [OPM website](#).

Spouse Preferences

Ten points are added to the passing examination score or rating of the Spouse of a disabled veteran who is disqualified for a Federal position along the general lines of his or her usual occupation because of a service-connected disability. Such a disqualification may be presumed when the veteran is unemployed and:

- is rated by appropriate military or Department of Veterans Affairs authorities to be 100 percent disabled and/or unemployable; or
- has retired, been separated, or resigned from a civil service position on the basis of a disability that is service-connected in origin; or

⁴⁶ OPM's Human Resources Flexibilities and Authorities in the Federal Government at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/reference-materials/handbooks/humanresourcesflexibilitiesauthorities.pdf>

⁴⁷ OPM Why Preference is Given at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/veterans-services/vet-guide-for-hr-professionals/>.

- has attempted to obtain a civil service position or other position along the lines of his or her usual occupation and has failed to qualify because of a service-connected disability.⁴⁸

Preference may be allowed in other circumstances but anything less than the above warrants a more careful analysis. Note also that Veterans' preference for Spouses is different than the preference the Department of Defense is required by law to extend to Spouses of active duty members in filling its civilian positions.⁴⁹ Noncompetitive appointment of certain military Spouses was originally authorized by Executive Order 13473.⁵⁰ It has since been the subject of several revised iterations and enactments⁵¹ and enhanced with Executive Order 13832⁵², and is now codified at **5 U.S.C. 3330d**.⁵³

⁴⁸ OPM's Human Resources Flexibilities and Authorities in the Federal Government at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/reference-materials/handbooks/humanresourcesflexibilitiesauthorities.pdf>.

⁴⁹ OPM's Human Resources Flexibilities and Authorities in the Federal Government at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/reference-materials/handbooks/humanresourcesflexibilitiesauthorities.pdf>.

⁵⁰ See Presidential Documents in the Federal Register at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2008-09-30/pdf/E8-23125.pdf>.

⁵¹ See Proposed Rules in the Federal Register at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-05-29/pdf/2020-10768.pdf>.

⁵² See Presidential Documents in the Federal Register at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2018-05-14/pdf/2018-10403.pdf>.

⁵³ Full text available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2015-title5/pdf/USCODE-2015-title5-partIII-subpartB-chap33-subchapI-sec3330d.pdf>.

The Table below is derived from OPM's Employment of Veterans in the Federal Executive Branch Fiscal year 2018 report⁵⁴ (the most recently available version) which shows federal non-competitive appointments of certain military Spouses. In 2017 Total Military Spouse Appointments were 0.56% of Federal New Hires. This percentage rose to 0.72% in 2018.

| | FY 2018 | | |
|--|-------------------|------------------------------------|--------------|
| | Federal New Hires | Total Military Spouse Appointments | % |
| Total Executive Branch Agencies | 228,243 | 1,652 | 0.72% |
| Executive Order Agencies | | | |
| Agriculture | 17,406 | 5 | 0.03% |
| Commerce | 4,464 | 2 | 0.04% |
| Defense | 73,726 | 1,515 | 2.05% |
| Air Force | 14,369 | 433 | 3.01% |
| Army | 23,244 | 672 | 2.89% |
| Navy | 23,194 | 219 | 0.94% |
| Defense Activities | 12,919 | 191 | 1.48% |
| Education | 92 | 0 | 0.00% |
| Energy | 746 | 0 | 0.00% |
| HHS | 6,005 | 4 | 0.07% |
| Homeland Security | 26,254 | 20 | 0.08% |
| HUD | 183 | 0 | 0.00% |
| Interior | 14,419 | 5 | 0.03% |
| Justice | 5,900 | 6 | 0.10% |
| Labor | 447 | 1 | 0.22% |
| State | 630 | 0 | 0.00% |
| Transportation | 3,312 | 1 | 0.03% |
| Treasury | 7,448 | 0 | 0.00% |
| Veterans Affairs | 53,274 | 44 | 0.08% |
| AID | 92 | 0 | 0.00% |
| EPA | 345 | 0 | 0.00% |
| GSA | 310 | 2 | 0.65% |
| NASA | 919 | 1 | 0.11% |
| NSF | 144 | 0 | 0.00% |
| OPM | 440 | 12 | 2.73% |
| NRC* | 67 | 0 | 0.00% |
| SSA | 4,715 | 31 | 0.66% |
| SBA | 3,820 | 1 | 0.03% |

⁵⁴ OPM. (2020, November). *Employment of Veterans in the Federal Executive Branch*. <https://www.fedshirevets.gov/veterans-council/veteran-employment-data/employment-of-veterans-in-the-federal-executive-branch-fy2018.pdf>

Work-Life Balance

Work-life is the business practice of creating a flexible, supportive environment to engage employees & maximize organizational performance.⁵⁵ The Federal Government supports employee engagement in the community, at work, and at home in a variety of ways - in order to foster a workforce that best meets the needs of the American public. As the nation's largest employer, supporting federal employees in balancing the responsibilities of work, family, and community,⁵⁶ Agencies strive to help create healthy communities for our citizens.

Work-life programs are critical management tools for the Federal community as we strive to maintain an excellent, engaged workforce. Key work-life programs offered to Federal employees include worksite health and wellness, Employee Assistance Programs, workplace flexibilities, telework, and dependent care. When implemented according to today's best practices, work-life programs can demonstrate significant benefits for agencies, employees, and our communities.⁵⁷

Telework

Since the onset of COVID-19, most (if not all) Veterans within Interagency Veterans have expressed support for the expanded **telework posture**, and indicated that their membership greatly prefers teleworking as compared to the pre-pandemic, in-person working posture. Advances in technology, adaptation in operational styles, and management support for teleworking has created a situation where employees are more productive^{58 59 60} and benefit from the absence of commute times and travel-to-work costs.^{61 62}

Additionally, a Gallup survey recently indicated that telework provides a sense of safety to Veterans who suffer from PTSD or other mental health conditions related to exposure to external stimuli.⁶³

Interagency Veterans **unequivocally supports expanded, long-term, and long-distance telework programs** at Departments and Agencies. See the **Recommendation** later in this report.

Child, Dependent, and Elder Care

Child, Dependent, or Elder Care can be expensive, especially for lower income families, but without comprehensive care arrangements, working parents are hard-pressed to remain effective either at work or home. Many Federal agencies provide assistance to employees through multiple means, including on-site childcare, resource and referral services, and the childcare subsidy program. Many Federal employees

⁵⁵ OPM's Work-Life at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/>.

⁵⁶ See U.S. General Services Administration's Work/Life Balance and Wellness at <https://www.gsa.gov/about-us/careers-at-gsa/why-work-at-gsa/work-life-balance-and-wellness>.

⁵⁷ OPM's Work-Life at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/>.

⁵⁸ See AFGE's Nearly 80% of federal, D.C. workers say they are more productive teleworking during pandemic, Union survey shows at <https://www.afge.org/publication/nearly-80-of-federal-d.c.-workers-say-they-were-more-productive-teleworking-during-pandemic-union-survey-shows/>.

⁵⁹ See Telework.gov's Common Myths at <https://www.telework.gov/federal-community/telework-managers/common-myths/>

⁶⁰ See OPM Telework's Benefits for Agencies at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/awareness-communication-materials/brochures/telework.pdf>.

⁶¹ See OPM Recruiting and Retention at <https://www.telework.gov/guidance-legislation/telework-guidance/recruitment-retention/>.

⁶² See OPM Telework's Benefits for Agencies at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/awareness-communication-materials/brochures/telework.pdf>.

⁶³ See Military times at <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/11/27/remote-work-could-be-silver-lining-of-pandemic-for-some-veterans-including-those-with-ptsd/>.

also have access to the Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account program, which can be used for childcare or camp.⁶⁴

Federal agencies are authorized to offer childcare subsidies to their employees. Information on subsidies can be found on **OPM's Website**, which provides a list of Agency contacts, or at the specific Department or Agency's human resources office.

For additional information on Childcare Subsidies and options, see the OPM Childcare Resources Handbook.⁶⁵

Federal agencies are also authorized to offer elder and adult dependent care. Information on programs can be found on **OPM's Website**, or in the **OPM Handbook on Workplace Flexibilities and Work-Life Programs for Elder Care**.

The Work-Life Agency Coordinators search tool is located at <https://www.opm.gov/cclcontact/>.

⁶⁴ See OPM's Childcare and Parenting at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/dependent-care/#url=Child-Care-Parenting>.

⁶⁵ See <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/reference-materials/child-care-resources-handbook/>.

Veteran Employment During COVID-19

COVID-19 had a definitive impact on employment across the Country, but Veterans fared well compared to their non-Veteran counterparts.⁶⁶ In fact, in 2020, the unemployment rates for Veterans were lower than their non-Veteran counterparts.⁶⁷ This data may be misleading as a result of the military entrance criteria; the precursor to Veteran status. The military generally requires graduation from high school^{68 69} prior to enlistment; thus, all⁷⁰ Veterans have an education of at least high school equivalency. The general public has an educational level of at least high school equivalency between 86%^{71 72} and 90%⁷³.

Veterans may have been able to sustain their employment at a higher rate (lower unemployment rate) during COVID than their non-Veteran counterparts but would not have experienced advantages or higher wages as a result.

COVID-19 FAST FACTS ON VETERAN EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment rates for both male and female Veterans increased in 2020, reflecting the COVID-19 pandemic. The unemployment rate for male Veterans was 6.5 percent; little different from the rate of 6.7 percent for female Veterans.

- Unemployment rates for White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic Veterans were lower than for their non-Veteran counterparts in 2020.
- Among the 581,000 unemployed Veterans in 2020, 54 percent were ages 25 to 54, 41 percent were age 55 and over, and 5 percent were ages 18 to 24.
- The unemployment rate of Veterans with a service-connected disability, at 6.2 percent in August 2020, did not have a statistically significant change over the year. The rate for Veterans with no disability rose to 7.2 percent during the same timeframe.
- Gulf War-era II Veterans who reported a service-connected disability rating of less than 30 percent were much more likely to be in the labor force than those with a rating of 60 percent or higher in August 2020 (91.5 percent, compared with 63.6 percent).
- In August 2020, 31 percent of employed Veterans with a service-connected disability worked in the public sector, compared with 19 percent of Veterans with no disability and 14 percent of non-Veterans.
- In 2020, the unemployment rate of Veterans varied across the country, ranging from 2.7 percent in Nebraska to 11.3 percent in Michigan.

⁶⁶ See Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Situation of Veterans News Release at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.htm>.

⁶⁷ See Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Situation of Veterans News Release at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.htm>.

⁶⁸ See <https://www.militaryconsumer.gov/earn/finding-and-paying-school/getting-high-school-equivalency-diploma> for additional information.

⁶⁹ See <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/challenges-education-employment-and-military> for additional information.

⁷⁰ Or nearly all (except for waivers or select military enlistment programs that offer assistance in obtaining high school equivalency certification)

⁷¹ See Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics at <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=805>.

⁷² See also Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/coi>.

⁷³ See U.S. Census Bureau *High School Completion Rate is Highest in U.S. History* at <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2017/educational-attainment-2017.html>.

COVID-19:

And Impacts to Veteran Employment

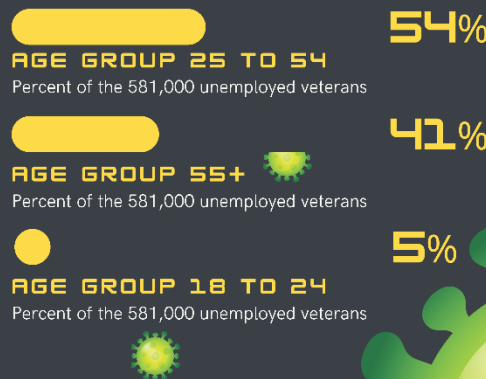


Unemployment rates for both male and female veterans increased in 2020, reflecting the COVID-19 pandemic. The rate for male veterans was 6.5 percent, little different from the rate of 6.7 percent for female veterans.

"THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FOR VETERANS WITH A SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABILITY WAS 6.2 PERCENT IN AUGUST 2020, NOT STATISTICALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE RATE FOR VETERANS WITH NO DISABILITY (7.2 PERCENT).

In 2020, the unemployment rate of veterans varied across the country, ranging from 2.7 percent in Nebraska to 11.3 percent in Michigan.

The unemployment rate varied among the 581,000 unemployed veterans in 2020 by age group,



In August 2020, 31 percent of employed veterans with a service-connected disability worked in the public sector, compared with 19 percent of veterans with no disability and 14 percent of nonveterans.

Unemployment rates for White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic veterans were lower than for their nonveteran counterparts in 2020.

Learn more at Bureau of Labor Statistics News Release titled Employment Situation of Veterans 2020, dated Thursday, March 18, 2021

⁷⁴ See <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/latest-numbers> for details on COVID-19 Fast Facts on Veteran Employment.

Veteran Employment Outside of the Federal Government

Veteran employment outside of the federal government is not an area of focus for Interagency Veterans, but we thought it important to include selected aspects of non-federal employment for Veterans in the report to give context to the larger employment situation facing Veterans and disabled Veterans. Content contained in this section is for informational purposes only and intended as supplemental to the content surrounding Veterans in the federal workforce.

The Department of Veterans Affairs requested that a national survey of at least 100 employers, consisting of small, mid-size, and large (Fortune 500 and Fortune 1000) businesses be conducted.⁷⁵ The study gathered information regarding these businesses' "current policies, practices, and programs regarding Veterans, National Guard, and Reserve who were activated for service in OEF/OIF". The survey investigated businesses' experience with hiring and retaining Veterans, comparisons with prior Veteran populations, understanding of mental health and related needs of Veterans, and understanding of services that would support Veterans with these needs. The final report presented findings from the survey including "promising practices" that emerge from the data. The Veterans interviewed at the six Fortune 500 companies described how the transition experience can be complicated by a number of factors, to include⁷⁶:

- Physical and psychological service-related injuries (including PTSD).
- Lack of a clear and easy way to communicate one's experience and skills.
- Being misunderstood by co-workers due to differences in one's manner, expectations, and speech.
- Missing the sense of mission and urgency within the military that resulted from knowing that the lives of others might depend on the speed and quality of one's own work.
- Missing the camaraderie and bonds fostered by working and living in close quarters and depending on each other in critical, life and death situations.
- Loss of camaraderie and bonds can create feelings of painful loneliness.

To overcome these issues, individuals within leadership positions at each of the six companies, often Veterans themselves, developed innovative initiatives to help Veterans navigate these issues.⁷⁷ For example, initiatives with an emphasis on peer support, such as affinity and networking groups (civilian ERGs), are designed, in part, to diminish the sense of loneliness some transitioning Veterans feel upon losing the close relationships that can be the hallmark of their military experience. These groups are planned so that new bonds can easily be forged in a relaxed setting among Veterans interested in sharing their experiences and networking with others in the company. Mentors can share their experiences navigating these office issues and dynamics. In addition, mentors with a personal experience of PTSD symptoms can help others with the same by describing their own experiences, exploring strategies to manage symptoms, and providing evidence and hope that current difficulties can improve over time.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ See Veterans in the Workplace: Recruitment and Retention at https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/veterans_in_workplace_final_report.pdf.

⁷⁶ See Veterans in the Workplace: Recruitment and Retention at https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/veterans_in_workplace_final_report.pdf.

⁷⁷ See Veterans in the Workplace: Recruitment and Retention at https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/veterans_in_workplace_final_report.pdf.

⁷⁸ See Veterans in the Workplace: Recruitment and Retention at https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/veterans_in_workplace_final_report.pdf.

Additionally, it's possible that younger separating Servicemembers and Veterans may have never looked for, applied for, or interviewed for a civilian (private sector) job, especially if he or she had a career in the military.⁷⁹ This presents unique challenges for both private sector recruiters and Veterans seeking private sector employment.

While many Veterans have jobs, it's possible that those jobs are low-wage and do not offer opportunities for advancement. The government programs that offer Veterans support in their employment journey are not centralized or personalized to Veterans' individualized life circumstances.⁸⁰

The President's Management Agenda (PMA) Cross Agency Priority (CAP) Goal on Customer Experience lists a number of successfully recognized practices that transitioning Servicemembers, and Veterans performed when transitioning into new employment⁸¹. These "building blocks" include:

- Identifying career interests and exploring pathways to get there
- Pursuing certifications or other education credentials that advance skills within their field, or outside of their field
- Building a network that will be supportive during transition to the labor force and civilian life
- Preparing financially for the future
- Accepting the coming transition and actively take steps to prepare for it
- Taking stock of the formal and informal skills gained in Service
- Learning where one fits into the civilian job market
- Attending job fairs
- Practicing communicating their value for a civilian workplace audience
- Learning and practicing civilian workplace culture
- Doing an internship, fellowship, or apprenticeship
- Cultivating a career-related network inside and outside of the military to support their plan
- Crafting a reality-based budget for after separation
- Taking off time to decompress
- Finding a trusted and healthy support community, including other Veterans
- Connecting with Veteran Service Organizations⁸²
- Turning down job offers that don't take them where they want to be, and wait to accept the jobs that do
- Taking a job to pay bills while earning education credentials that will help put them on their preferred career pathway
- Thinking about the next, better job that they want

Additional Veteran Employment Resources

These additional resources are provided as a convenience, and not intended to address any questions or issues surrounding them.

⁷⁹ See VA's Veterans Employment Toolkit at https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em_challengesreadjust.asp.

⁸⁰ See Performance.gov's Seeking Employment after Service at <https://www.performance.gov/cx/projects/va/journey/>.

⁸¹ See the President's Management Agenda *Servicemember Transition to Civilian Employment Journey* on performance.gov at https://www.performance.gov/cx/assets/files/Service_Member_Transition_to_Civilian_Employment_Journey_Map.pdf.

⁸² See VA's Directory of Veterans Service Organizations at <https://www.va.gov/vso/>.

Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Labor

The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor provide a litany of materials to aid in Veterans' job searches. See

<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/>,
<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/veteran-resources/>, <https://www.vaforvets.va.gov/>, and
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets>.

Department of Labor Employment Workshop (DOLEW)

The DOLEW is a three-day workshop that provides employment counseling, information, skills building, training, and education to meet the 25 employment-related career readiness standards. Programmatic changes in response to the VOW Act⁸³ made the program easier to manage, increased consistency, and provided DOL the capabilities to manage the large volume of participants.⁸⁴

American Job Centers and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies

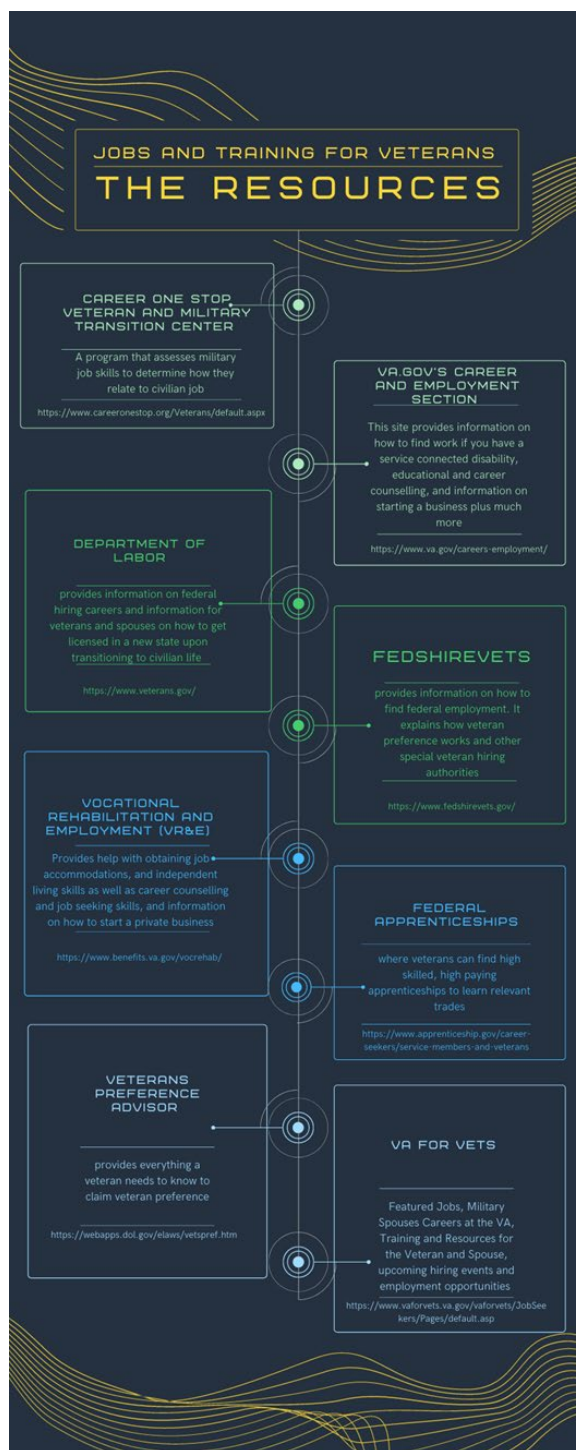
Partnerships with the American Job Centers, state-level installation centers, and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies provide support in finding employment at the local level. DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) funds the American Jobs Centers (AJC) system. The AJC system is both a local and a nationwide resource, and Veterans receive priority of service at those AJCs.^{85 86}

Veteran Entrepreneurship Programs

According to the Small Business Administration, Veterans are 45 percent more likely to be self-employed than non-Veterans.⁸⁷ SBA has established several interagency partnerships that look to address the unique challenges Veterans face.

Boots to Business (B2B)

B2B is a partnership with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University and works to educate transitioning service members, and their spouses, interested in starting their own business. Through the SBA, the B2B program looks



⁸³ See <https://chcoc.gov/content/vow-veterans-opportunity-work-hire-heroes-act-2011>.

⁸⁴ See <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/VETS/files/DOLEW-Participant-Guide.pdf>.

⁸⁵ See <https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/training/onestop>.

⁸⁶ See <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/alliances/previous/naswa>.

⁸⁷ U.S. Small Business Administration *Facts on Veterans and Entrepreneurship* at <https://www.sba.gov/content/facts-veterans-and-entrepreneurship>.

to provide mentorship opportunities in the hopes that, through mentoring, the Veterans will learn about the challenges that small businesses face.⁸⁸

Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOC)

The VBOC program provides Veterans with entrepreneurial development services such as business training, business counseling and resource partner referrals. These services are designed to help Veterans who are looking either start or grow a business. Overall, twenty-two organizations participate in the VBOC program and provide support to interested Veterans.⁸⁹

National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (ATTRA)

ATTRA is a program committed to providing high-value information and technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, extension agents, educators, and others involved in sustainable agriculture in the United States. ATTRA provides Armed to Farm workshops to give Veterans the opportunity to learn about sustainable small-scale farming as well as provides firsthand opportunities for Veterans to work with agribusinesses.⁹⁰

Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP)

The Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) offers education and training for high-demand jobs to Veterans who are unemployed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹¹

CareerOneStop

CareerOneStop offers resources for transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses, and has a Veterans and Military Transition Center.⁹²

MilitaryOneSource

MilitaryOneSource.mil offers a number of resources for Veterans employment, including some of the top sites.⁹³

⁸⁸ See <https://www.sba.gov/sba-learning-platform/boots-business>.

⁸⁹ See <https://www.sba.gov/local-assistance/resource-partners/veterans-business-outreach-center-vboc-program>.

⁹⁰ See <https://www.armedtofarm.org/> and <https://attra.ncat.org/>.

⁹¹ See <https://www.va.gov/education/other-va-education-benefits/veteran-rapid-retraining-assistance/>.

⁹² See <https://www.careeronestop.org/ResourcesFor/Veteran/veteran.aspx>.

⁹³ See <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/military-life-cycle/separation-transition/employment-education/programs-that-hire-veterans/>.

Employment Areas of Focus and Opportunities for Improvement

In this section, a couple areas of focus are discussed and opportunities for improvement are mentioned that require a broader approach to improving – generally more excessive than what would fit in a single recommendation or call for action.

Hiring and Retention

Many of the issues previously discussed in the **Veterans Employment** section of this report is covered in greater detail here. Of specific note are the factors identified in the GAO report⁹⁴, and highlighted in this infographic. They include:

Work that is Meaningful – As a member of the military one never needs to look past their uniform to find meaning. The rich history and current conflicts demonstrate every job is essential to the greater mission. Often, the private sector and federal civilian employment does not illustrate the overall importance of each role as clearly as the military, or how a job pertains to the overall mission as well as the military does. Veterans who felt their work gave them a feeling of personal accomplishment were 3.2 percentage points less likely, on average, to consider leaving federal service.⁹⁵

Confidence in Leaders – Leaders are the key to organizational change—they must set the direction, pace, and tone, and provide a clear, consistent rationale that brings everyone together behind a single mission.

Opportunities for Advancement – Upward and lateral mobility opportunities are important for retaining employees, and agencies can use details and rotations to meet employees’ desire for mobility.⁹⁶ The opportunities for advancement have a clear set of standards applied across the military. Upon taking a new position or advancing, the new roles are clearly stated. When a lower-enlisted member of the military becomes a non-commissioned officer, a major shift happens in

maturity and responsibility. The military does a great job allowing individuals with different expertise to supervise groups they may not be as familiar with. This expanded level of responsibility is developmental



⁹⁴ GAO. (July, 2020). *OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran retention Rates.* <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-592.pdf>.

⁹⁵ GAO. (July, 2020). *OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran retention Rates.* <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-592.pdf>.

⁹⁶ GAO. (July, 2020). *OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran retention Rates.* <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-592.pdf>.

in nature and instills a level of confidence in young leaders that most private sector and civilian jobs do not offer. Thus, the transition from a 22-year-old Sergeant to an entry-level analyst may feel like a demotion to the Veteran. Organizations can realize this and offer additional areas for contribution commensurate with the skills and abilities of the Veteran.

Training and Skills Development – The essential aim of training and development programs is to assist an agency in achieving its mission and goals by improving individual and, ultimately, organizational performance. Training and skill development are not only important for mission goals for the employees to know and understand their jobs but training also keeps employees interested. Training and development in the military is second to none. Whether it is training additional skills for the employees' current job or new skills to cross train, the military uses resources to keep their employees trained. Many of the cross-training endeavors align with promotability and sometimes more pay.

Good relationship with supervisors – In the military, comradery with one's peers, subordinates, and supervisors is crucial to the good moral and discipline of the force.⁹⁷ Often, because of the promotion schedule and rank structure, superiors have risen from the lower ranks, and such promotion occurs at a fairly often pace.^{98 99} This creates situations where peers who had previously worked alongside one another are now in a supervisor-subordinate relationship. Often after minor social and administrative adjustments are made, the relationship between the two individuals is maintained on good terms.

This differs from the private sector and civilian workforce where individuals will stay in roles, especially higher ranking and leadership roles, for longer periods of time. In fact, the public sector had a median tenure of 6.5 years¹⁰⁰, nearly double the median tenure for private sector employees.¹⁰¹ Both of these numbers may seem foreign to Veterans, since it's not uncommon in the military to be reassigned to a new role every year or every couple of years. In fact, the Department of Defense indicated that "on average, about once every 2 to 3 years, military personnel receive orders to relocate to a new assignment."¹⁰²

As a result of this more stagnate ecosystem in the private and civilian sectors, there are fewer previous peer relationships, and there are fewer cycles for rotation for either party (superior or subordinate) to organically depart or leave an undesirable superior-subordinate relationship.

Satisfaction with Pay – In the military, salaries are often supported with additional allowances for food or housing¹⁰³, depending on the duty location. This can create an inflated perception of income for transitioning Servicemembers, because their base salary indicates a certain wage, but non-taxable allowances are not included in that number. Thus, a Veteran who made \$75,000 in the military as a senior non-commissioned officer, may have been actually receiving the equivalent of closer to \$100,000 - \$125,000 while on Active Duty. This variance is exacerbated when the Servicemember serves in a tax-exclusion (combat) zone for part or all of the year – as some of their base salary may not be taxable either.

Contrast that with the Veteran who is applying for civilian jobs, where essentially all income is taxable, and additional tax-free allowances are not provided for housing and food. The Veteran may initially view an offer of \$85,000 as very comparable or a slight increase from their time in the Service, but it's actually a fairly significant decline in overall pay.

⁹⁷ See concept outlined in Harvard Business Review at <https://hbr.org/2013/07/we-all-need-friends-at-work>.

⁹⁸ See https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/military_white_paper_final.pdf.

⁹⁹ See <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/military-life-cycle/friends-extended-family/military-promotions-what-friends-and-family-should-know/>.

¹⁰⁰ See Bureau of Labor Statistics on *Tenure* at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/tenure.nr0.htm>.

¹⁰¹ See Bureau of Labor Statistics on *Tenure* at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/tenure.nr0.htm>.

¹⁰² Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainment at https://www.acq.osd.mil/eie/fim/Housing/Housing_overview.html.

¹⁰³ See *Military Compensation* at <https://militarypay.defense.gov/pay/ALLOWANCES/>.

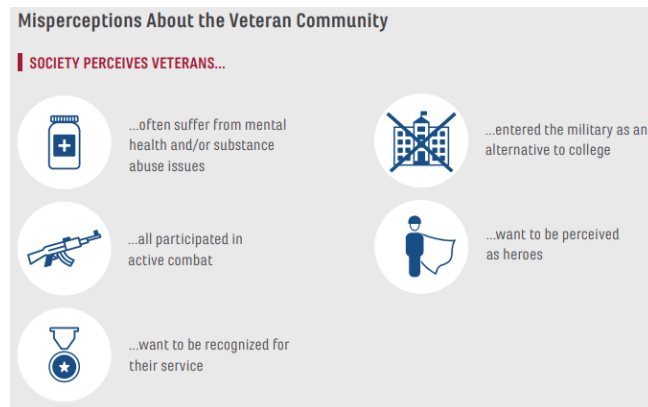
This is further complicated by the geographic factors of post-military employment. In the military, many bases are located in less densely populated areas, and the cost of living can be lower than metro areas. However, most high-paying jobs are in major metro areas where the overall cost of living is higher as well, and the value of a dollar is less than the Veteran is used to receiving. Upon separation from the military, many Veterans move to a retirement location (or second phase of life location) where 1) they want to be, but the pay is less, or 2) where the pay is commensurate or greater, but the cost of living is higher. This paradigm results in many Veterans citing satisfaction with pay as a negative factor in their employment.

Perceptions - Lived and Professional Experiences of Officers and Enlisted Personnel

It is difficult to categorize all Veterans into a single proverbial bucket, so it may be helpful to think of the stratification of Veterans along the lines of a taxonomy or Venn diagram – where differences, similarities, and range factors are all recognized for individual and overlapping characteristics. Veterans all have different levels of expertise, different lived experiences, and different skill sets. One factor that often distinguishes Veterans is their rank – whether previously as an Officer or Enlisted. This is visible in civilian job vacancy announcements when an advertisement states it is “seeking junior officers (O-1 to O-3)” or “seeking senior non-commissioned officers (E-7 to E-9)” for a particular role. Enlisted Personnel comprise approximately 82% of the military, while Officers comprise approximately 18%.¹⁰⁴

However, the vast majority of Veterans – 83%, to be exact – will not receive retirement benefits from the military.¹⁰⁵ In context, more than 4 out of 5 Veterans will continue their careers and educations beyond their rank in the military. This presents a fundamental challenge in defining Veterans solely by rank, job in the military, or whether they were an Officer or Enlisted.

Some Veterans prefer to focus on individual contributor tasks that require a level of expertise and output quality, while other Veterans enjoy the fast-paced tempo of an operational setting where deadlines, tasks, and variables heavily influence the work output. Further, other Veterans may be more aligned with managerial functions and generalist approaches to work. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to appealing to prospective Veteran employees, so Departments and Agencies should recognize that there are many facets to the Veteran workforce. Compounding this challenge is that fact that there are many misperceptions about the Veteran Community¹⁰⁶ that are simply not true.



One area of focus that Departments and Agencies should consider is the recruitment culture surrounding how they think about appealing to the various categories of Veterans. Veterans are not an isolated group, and there is a high level of variance among how individuals self-identify with their Veteran status. Department and Agency recruitment practices should reflect this diversity as well.

¹⁰⁴ See Bureau of Labor Statistics *Military Careers* at https://www.bls.gov/ooh/military/military-careers.htm?view_full.

¹⁰⁵ See Defense Business Board *Modernizing the Military Retirement System* at https://dbb.defense.gov/Portals/35/Documents/Reports/2011/FY11-5_Modernizing_The_Military_Retirement_System_2011-7.pdf.

¹⁰⁶ See the Institute for Museum and Library Services’ *Supporting Veterans and Military Families* at <https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/supporting-veterans-and-military-families-understanding.pdf>.

Enhancing Veterans Mental Health and Combating Veteran Suicide

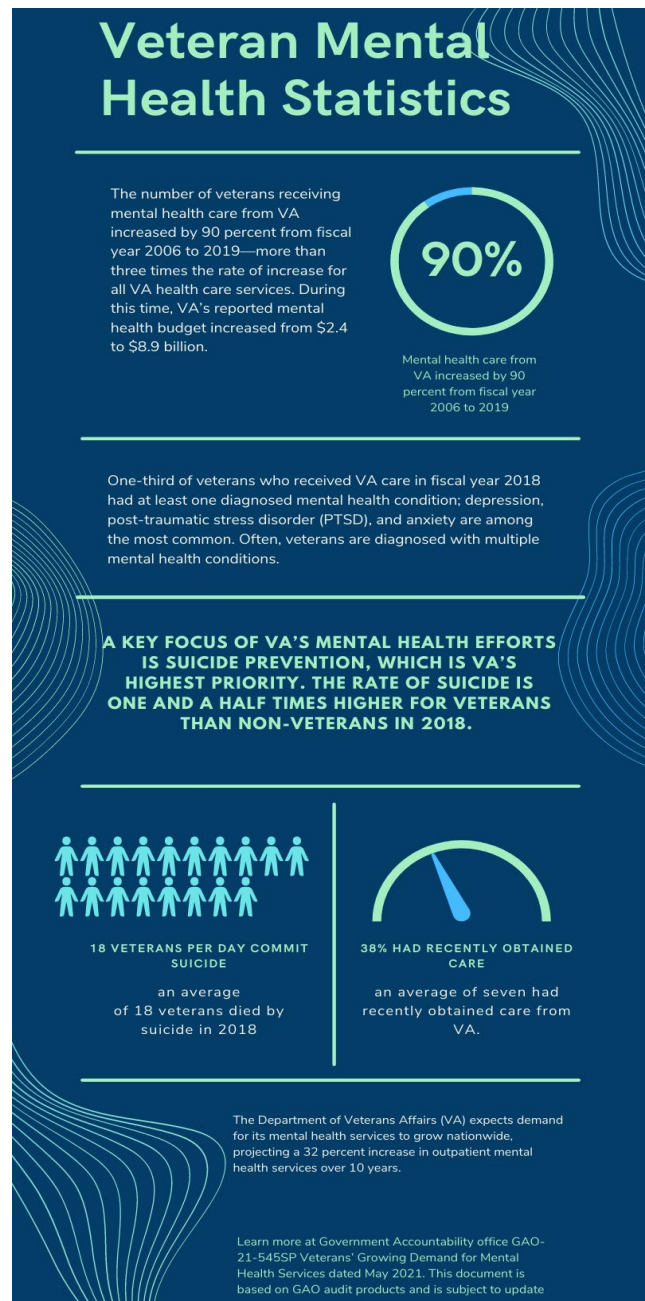
Mental Health

Demand for VA’s mental health services has expanded significantly over time.¹⁰⁷ The number of Veterans receiving mental health care from the VA increased by 90 percent from fiscal year 2006 to 2019—more than three times the rate of increase for all VA health care services. During this time, VA’s reported mental health budget increased from \$2.4 to \$8.9 billion.¹⁰⁸

One-third of Veterans who received VA care in fiscal year 2018 had at least one diagnosed mental health condition; depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and anxiety are among the most common. Often, Veterans are diagnosed with multiple mental health conditions.¹⁰⁹

Veterans enrolled in VA health care may receive a full array of mental health services from VA, and other Veterans may qualify to receive care in certain situations. Mental health treatment can include medication or other therapy, which can be delivered in a number of settings.¹¹⁰

More recently, Veterans from all eras [have been] reacting to the [recent] events in Afghanistan, such as the U.S withdrawal and the takeover by the Taliban, and may question the meaning of their service or whether it was worth their sacrifice.¹¹¹ It’s important to know that you are not alone. Veterans questioning the meaning of their service or whether it was worth the sacrifices they made may feel more moral distress about experiences they had during their service.



¹⁰⁷ See GAO report on VA Mental Health Treatment at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-545sp>.

¹⁰⁸ See GAO report on VA Mental Health Treatment at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-545sp>.

¹⁰⁹ See <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-545sp.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ See <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-545sp.pdf>.

¹¹¹ VA’s *Afghanistan: Let’s Talk About It* at <https://www.va.gov/northern-california-health-care/stories/afghanistan-lets-talk-about-it/>.

It's normal to feel this way. Talk with your friends and families, reach out to battle buddies, connect with a peer-to-peer network, or sign up for mental health services.¹¹²

Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Similar to many Americans, Veterans' mental health issues have heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹³ During this time, the VA has shifted most in-person mental health care to telehealth, including many care appointments by non-VA providers in the community.¹¹⁴

In the first 8 months of the pandemic, telehealth visits for mental health increased by over 200 percent at VA. In fact, in the earliest stages of the pandemic, telehealth visits for mental health increased by 556 percent between March 11 and April 22, 2020.¹¹⁵ In February 2021, 77 percent of VA mental health visits were telephone or tele-video visits.¹¹⁶ This indicates a very severe and impactful reaction to the disruption that COVID has caused, particularly in Veteran populations.

GAO reported that VA has conducted outreach to increase awareness of telehealth services and purchased tablets to provide Veterans with more access to telehealth medicine.¹¹⁷ The Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019¹¹⁸, enables VA to further expand telehealth services in underserved communities by awarding grants to set up additional access points.

COVID-19:
And Impacts to Veteran Mental Health

Similar to many in the U.S., veterans' mental health issues may have worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, VA shifted most in-person mental health care to telehealth, including for care by nonVA providers in the community

IN THE FIRST 8 MONTHS OF THE PANDEMIC, TELEHEALTH VISITS FOR MENTAL HEALTH INCREASED BY OVER 200 PERCENT AND IN FEBRUARY 2021, 77 PERCENT OF VA MENTAL HEALTH VISITS WERE TELEPHONE OR TELEVIDEO VISITS.

VA Researchers found that Veterans living in Rural Communities were 20% higher risk of committing suicide.

PTSD related to military service increases veterans risk of homelessness.

| Location | Number of Visits |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| VA Outpatient Clinics | 755 |
| Vet Centers | 380 |
| VA Medical Centers | 170 |

Veterans may access inpatient and outpatient mental health care from non-VA providers when they face certain challenges receiving care from a VA facility, such as long wait times or travel distance. Veterans may receive mental health care from their providers through telephone or video visits on devices in their home or in locations close to home.

GAO reported that VA has conducted outreach to increase awareness of telehealth services and purchased tablets to provide veterans with more access to telehealth since March 2020 (GAO-21-265). The Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 (Hannon Act), enacted in October 2020, enables VA to further expand telehealth services in underserved communities by awarding grants to set up additional access points

VA data indicates racial and ethnic disparities in access to services among veterans with mental health conditions. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender veterans may experience disparities including higher rates of depression and more frequent thoughts of suicide.

Learn more at Government Accountability office GAO-21-545SP Veterans' Growing Demand for Mental Health Services dated May 2021. This document is based on GAO audit products and is subject to update

¹¹² VA's *Afghanistan: Let's Talk About It* at <https://www.va.gov/northern-california-health-care/stories/afghanistan-lets-talk-about-it/>.

¹¹³ See CDC *Support for Veterans* at <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/stress-coping/veterans-support/index.html>.

¹¹⁴ See VA Press Release at <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5600>.

¹¹⁵ See https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA_Digital_Download/PEP21-06-02-001.pdf.

¹¹⁶ See <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-545sp.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ See GAO report on Critical Vaccine Distribution at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-265.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ See <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/785>.

Veteran Suicide

A key focus of VA's mental health efforts is suicide prevention, which is VA's highest priority. Veterans' mental health and Veteran suicide rates continue to be a persistent national problem. The rate of suicide is one and a half times higher for Veterans than non-veterans. In 2018, an average of 18 veterans died by suicide each day, and of those, an average of seven had recently obtained care from VA.

Interagency Veterans will continue to work with OPM, non-profit organizations, and researchers to support federal efforts to improve mental health for Veterans and their families and to combat Veteran suicide.

To focus federal agencies' attention on this national problem, on September 21, 2021, the IVAC and OPM's Office of Veterans Services hosted a government-wide seminar on Enhancing Veterans Mental Health and Combating Veteran Suicide. Over 700 federal employees participated in the two-hour seminar moderated by IVAC Senior Advisor, Dr. Jack Malgeri. Distinguished seminar speakers included: Dr. Paula Schnurr, Executive Director of the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention; Dr. Stephanie Gamble, Deputy Director, Director of Education and Research Dissemination, VA Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention; Kim Burditt, Senior Manager for Programming and Training for the TAPS Program; and Dr. Tara Thiagarajan, Founder and Chief Scientist of Sapien Labs. The web link to the recording of the seminar is:

<https://secgov.webex.com/secgov/ldr.php?RCID=e73d07194fb3b55ff7e2a7e8d127d403>
Password is: QdZRCj4y

Interagency Veterans cites below to the "[2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#)" ("Report"). The Report presents the most current mortality information through 2019. The "Next Steps" section of the Report on page 13 has a summary of key statistics and an overview of the strategic direction of the Veterans Administration in combating Veteran suicide:

<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2021/2021-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-FINAL-9-8-21.pdf>

Among several suicide prevention initiatives, the VA has implemented the Suicide Prevention 2.0 initiative (SP 2.0); Suicide Prevention Now initiative (Now); the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS); 988 and Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) expansion; new legislation, including the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 (Hannon Act) (P.L. 116-171) and the Veterans Comprehensive Prevention, Access to Care, and Treatment (COMPACT) Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-214); and collaborative efforts with VBA and collaborative interagency efforts with the Domestic Policy Council (DPC)".

Veterans in emotional crisis can receive help through the Veterans Crisis Line by calling:

1 (800) 273-8255 and pressing "1"

or by sending a text message to 838255 to be connected with a responder.

Recommendations of the Interagency Veterans Advisory Council

Interagency Veterans has reviewed hundreds of proposals and recommendations over the year, and the below mentioned recommendations are both supported by data, and encouraged by lived experiences. While there are a number of issues in the Veteran space, we believe these are appropriate to bring forward this year in support of our mission *Serving Those Who Served*.

Reduce Veteran Attrition

Reduce Veterans' Initial Five-Year Attrition Rates by 33%.

Veterans in the federal workforce leave their positions more often in the first five years, as compared to their non-Veteran counterparts. GAO found that Veterans 1) left federal positions at a higher rate, 2) resigned 1.6 times more often, and 3) left within the first five years of being hired 18.7% of the time.¹¹⁹

Interagency Veterans recommends that Departments and Agencies focus efforts to retain Veteran employees by creating environments that are welcoming and inclusive, support Military and Veteran ERGs, and address the factors noted in the **Employment Areas of Focus and Opportunities for Improvement section** of this report. Programs that utilize Veteran mentors, unity of effort, and team inclusion are likely to positively impact these efforts.

Service-Connected Disabled Veterans at the SES/SL Level

Departments and Agencies should seek to fill three percent (3%) of all SES/SL hires with service-connected Disabled Veterans.

Disabled Veterans rated by the Department of Veterans Affairs as having service-connected disabilities are underrepresented at the Senior Executive level. This essentially excludes their participation in senior staff functions and key leadership decisions.

The Veterans Benefits Administration reports that there are approximately five (5) million Veterans who have a service-connected rating¹²⁰, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 31% of disabled Veterans work in the public sector.¹²¹ This indicates that public sector employment inclusion practices are working well for disabled Veterans, but the lack of disabled Veterans in federal senior leadership positions is concerning.

By actively seeking to include more service-connected Disabled Veterans at the Senior Executive Service (SES)/Senior Level (SL) tier, disabled Veterans would be better represented in senior leadership positions and fully included in the workplace.

¹¹⁹ See GAO's Veteran Federal Employment at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-592>.

¹²⁰ See VA's Compensation Report for 2020 at https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2020_compensation.pdf.

¹²¹ See BLS Employment Situation of Veterans in 2020 at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/vet.pdf>.

Telework

Direct Agencies to Allow Telework for Veterans Whenever Possible, including Long-Term and Long Distance Telework.

Telework has been a valuable tool during the pandemic, and as mentioned in the **Telework Section** within this report, most Veterans within Interagency Veterans have expressed support for the expanded **telework posture**, and indicated that their membership greatly prefers teleworking as compared to the pre-pandemic, in-person working posture. Advances in technology, adaptation in operational styles, and management support for teleworking has created a situation where employees are more productive^{122 123} and benefit from the absence of commute times and travel-to-work costs.^{125 126}

Additionally, a Gallup survey recently indicated that telework provides a sense of safety to Veterans who suffer from PTSD or other mental health conditions related to exposure to external stimuli.¹²⁷ Allowing telework for Veterans suffering from mental health conditions is a powerful tool.

Interagency Veterans **unequivocally supports expanded, long-term, and long-distance telework programs** at Departments and Agencies.

We recommend that the Administration, through Executive Order, direct Executive Branch Agencies to allow telework for Veterans to the maximum extent possible.

Veteran Employee and Law Enforcement Suicides and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Develop a Federal Task Force Addressing Veteran and Federal Law Enforcement Suicides and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Both Veterans and federal law enforcement personnel (such as Border Patrol Agents^{128 129 130}) possess a significantly higher likelihood of suicide than the general population in American. There are significant benefits from both the Veterans and law enforcement communities learning from one another on best practices for mitigating suicide and effectively addressing PTSD.

Interagency Veterans recommends that the VA and NIH be tasked with leading an interagency working group focused on identifying innovative and effective practices in the Federal Government to address

¹²² See AFGE's Nearly 80% of federal, D.C. workers say they are more productive teleworking during pandemic, Union survey shows at <https://www.afge.org/publication/nearly-80-of-federal-d.c.-workers-say-they-were-more-productive-teleworking-during-pandemic-union-survey-shows/>.

¹²³ See Telework.gov's Common Myths at <https://www.telework.gov/federal-community/telework-managers/common-myths/>

¹²⁴ See OPM Telework's Benefits for Agencies at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/awareness-communication-materials/brochures/telework.pdf>.

¹²⁵ See OPM Recruiting and Retention at <https://www.telework.gov/guidance-legislation/telework-guidance/recruitment-retention/>.

¹²⁶ See OPM Telework's Benefits for Agencies at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/awareness-communication-materials/brochures/telework.pdf>.

¹²⁷ See Military times at <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/11/27/remote-work-could-be-silver-lining-of-pandemic-for-some-veterans-including-those-with-ptsd/>.

¹²⁸ See <https://qz.com/1738901/us-border-officers-die-by-suicide-30-percent-more-often-than-other-cops/>.

¹²⁹ See <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/border-patrol-suicide-rate-spikes/>.

¹³⁰ See CBP's Shine A Light Campaign at <https://www.cbp.gov/employee-resources/health-wellness/suicide-prevention/shine-light>.

suicide and PTSD, with a specific focus on Veterans and federal law enforcement agencies. Promising practices include agency-wide psychological wellbeing assessments of agency personnel, which could identify both mental health challenges and sources of resiliency within workforces. Agency-wide psychological wellbeing assessments would provide more nuanced understanding of the psychological needs of employees and help create more focused interventions to mitigate suicide likelihood and the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder among vulnerable populations within federal agencies.

Security Clearance Re-Examinations

Examine or Develop Additional Flexibilities related to Security Clearance and Background Check Re-Examinations.

Each year, a greatly under-reported number of Veterans and law enforcement personnel forgo mental health assistance for fear of losing their security clearances if they divulge mental health challenges in their lives, or the efforts taken to seek mental health treatment.¹³¹ This is true for security clearance positions, as well as law enforcement positions.

The Suitability and Security Clearance Performance Accountability Council (PAC)¹³² should lead a working group of federal agencies tasked with the responsibility of creating greater flexibilities and reform across the Federal Government in the security clearances re-examination process so that employees undergoing re-examinations of their security clearances are not penalized or fearful of disclosing that they sought mental health assistance.¹³³ Additionally, actively providing a “safe harbor” avenue to pursue mental health treatment at an external facility (not the Veteran’s home Agency¹³⁴) would benefit federal employee Veterans who struggle with mental health issues.

USERRA Enhancements

OMB Should Establish a Coordinated Working Group on Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

Interagency Veterans recommends that OMB establish a coordinated working group led by the Department of Labor, Department of Justice, and the Office of Special Counsel, and comprised of representatives from all federal agencies. The USERRA working group would be tasked with the responsibility of creating a uniform model for ensuring well conceptualized best practices to ensure USERRA in the Federal workplace, modelled after best practices utilized in the private sector. The working group would have the authority to recommend legislative changes to create greater enforcement authority for ensuring that agencies and their personnel are adhering to USERRA requirements and not discriminating against military Servicemembers and Veterans under USERRA.

¹³¹ See <https://www.cbp.gov/employee-resources/health-wellness/suicide-prevention/psychological-emotional-treatment-periodic-investigations>.

¹³² See <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/ncsc-how-we-work/ncsc-security-executive-agent/ncsc-reform> and <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/ncsc-how-we-work/ncsc-security-executive-agent/ncsc-reform-effort/ncsc-security-suitability-reform-effort>.

¹³³ Limited resources are available countering this stigma, such as https://www.dcsa.mil/Portals/91/Documents/pv/DODCAF/resources/DCSA-FactSheet_Mental-Health.pdf, but Interagency Veterans believes such stigma still exists. This is a case where reality on the ground differs from policy in Washington, DC.

¹³⁴ For example: an agency establishes an agreement with a private sector entity or at a similar federal agency so that their employees can seek the services “off site.”

2022 Planned Priorities to Address

In 2022, Interagency Veterans will begin a series of initiatives designed to support Veterans and Military Spouses in the federal workplace and make the federal government an employer of choice for those seeking to continue service to others.

Priorities in 2022 include a series of administrative and operational objectives that will improve the operating effectiveness of the Council, and support Veterans and Military Families across the federal workforce.

Operational Priorities:

- Further support the *Joining Forces* initiative and expand the Military Spouse Advocacy program into a regional and global community model.
- Spearhead an interagency employment fair for Veterans, Transitioning Servicemembers, and Military Spouses with the intention of onboarding Veterans, Reservists and National Guard personnel, and Military Spouses into the federal government.
- Host a *Veterans ERG Best Practices Virtual Summit* featuring guest speakers on employee engagement and case studies/examples from Veterans ERGs across the government.
- Host a companion mental health webinar to the highly successful joint *Interagency Veterans and OPM Enhancing Veterans Mental Health and Combating Veteran Suicide*.

Administrative Priorities:

- Seek formal appointment of Interagency Veterans to the *President's Council on Veterans Employment*.
- Develop [InteragencyVeterans.gov](https://www.interagencyveterans.gov) into a consolidated online presence that allows for member self-service for subscribe/unsubscribe functionality and warehousing of materials.
- Better leverage **social media** to communicate with membership and larger stakeholder community.

Looking Ahead

Interagency Veterans believes that employment and mental health topics will continue to be particularly relevant as the Nation emerges from the pandemic. For federal employee Veterans, the new operating posture¹³⁵ – whatever that ultimately turns out to be – will be a period of adjustment as teleworking options and virtual landscapes take shape. We will continue to monitor and adjust the areas of focus based on changing dynamics in the community, as well as input from our membership.

Work-life balance will be important to monitor as Veterans are married or in civil unions more often than the non-Veteran population^{136 137 138}, and like many federal employees, often have families or dependents. This makes the differences in approaches to dealing with families, children, and job requirements disparately affect Veterans in a way felt less than the non-Veteran workforce.

Additionally, focus will be given to the areas of selfless service – as we hope to further expand the community service models exemplified at our member ERGS. Regional events, community service innovations, and employee enhancement activities will be promulgated as fully as possible.

Virtual events will remain the norm for Interagency Veterans into the foreseeable future, but we will examine ways to make ALL events either hybrid in nature or containing a virtual element so that Veterans and Military Spouses around the world can participate. During the past 18 months, participation in Interagency Veterans quarterly meetings has increased, and it's a direct result of the familiarity and accessibility of virtual meeting platforms. We will strive to continue in either virtual or blended formats going forward.

We hope you will continue to join us as an Interagency Veterans community!

¹³⁵ See OPM Memorandum for Chief Human Capital Officers at <https://www.chcoc.gov/sites/default/files/CPM%202021-17%20Additional%20Guidance%20on%20Post-Reentry%20Personnel%20Policies%20and%20Work%20Environment.pdf>.

¹³⁶ See VA's *The Veteran Population* at <https://www.chcoc.gov/sites/default/files/CPM%202021-17%20Additional%20Guidance%20on%20Post-Reentry%20Personnel%20Policies%20and%20Work%20Environment.pdf>.

¹³⁷ See NIH's *Evaluation of the Department of Veterans Affairs Mental Health Services* at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK499497/>.

¹³⁸ See Census at <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2021/comm/never-married-on-the-rise.html>.

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Appendix A – 2021 Letter to Members



February 4, 2021

2021 Letter to Members

Greetings Fellow Military and Veteran Leaders –

From the most unusual 2020 to a challenging start in 2021, your efforts and steadfastness have persevered in the most uncommon of times. As civilian stewards of our Nation's Government, your efforts have been both supportive during the pandemic, and mission-focused to bring forward the next phase in democracy.

As we bid farewell to President Trump and welcome President Biden's Administration, the opportunity to serve America's Military and Veterans has never been greater. As a diverse cohort of federal employees, we have the sacred responsibility to uphold the Constitution and the Bill of Rights – ensuring that *all* Americans receive the best we have to offer.

While the compounding impacts of COVID-19, protests across U.S. cities, and damage in The Capitol have shaken the established norms of our everyday lives – they do not define us. In fact, the country has been through much worse: our Nation's birth was forged through the [Revolutionary War](#), we found unification after a [Civil War](#), persevered victoriously during [World War I](#), survived a surprise attack on [Pearl Harbor](#) that brought us into World War II, fought wars abroad in [Korea](#) and [Vietnam](#), and at home for [Civil Rights](#). Many of you spent time overseas in places like Panama, Kuwait, Iraq, Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, and Yemen - away from your families and fighting for American interests.

Knowing that we have overcome the worst, allows us to see the best. In 2020, the IVAC supported numerous events virtually, created mentoring opportunities for many federal employee Veterans – many of whom had yet to meet their coworkers in person because of the [telework](#) posture, and sustained our core value of *Serving Those Who Served*.

2021 is slated to be a year of development and growth amongst our membership, participatory support for Military and Veteran communities, and organizational maturation within each of our member Employee Groups. With strong support from Officers and Volunteers, we have outlined a robust calendar for pursuit in 2021 and hope that you will join us in our efforts to recruit and retain the best and brightest our Nation has to offer.

I can be reached directly at (202) 401-2795 or Lloyd.Calderon@sba.gov. We look forward to continuing to Serve alongside each of you in 2021. Godspeed.

Sincerely,

Lloyd Calderón

Lloyd Calderón, MA
USAF, Retired
Chair

Adam Anicich

Adam Anicich
Vice Chair

Greg Kim

Gregory Kim
Chief Technology
Officer

Tammy McClain

Tammy McClain
Chief Administrative
Officer

Diane Chan

Diane Chan
Communications
Director

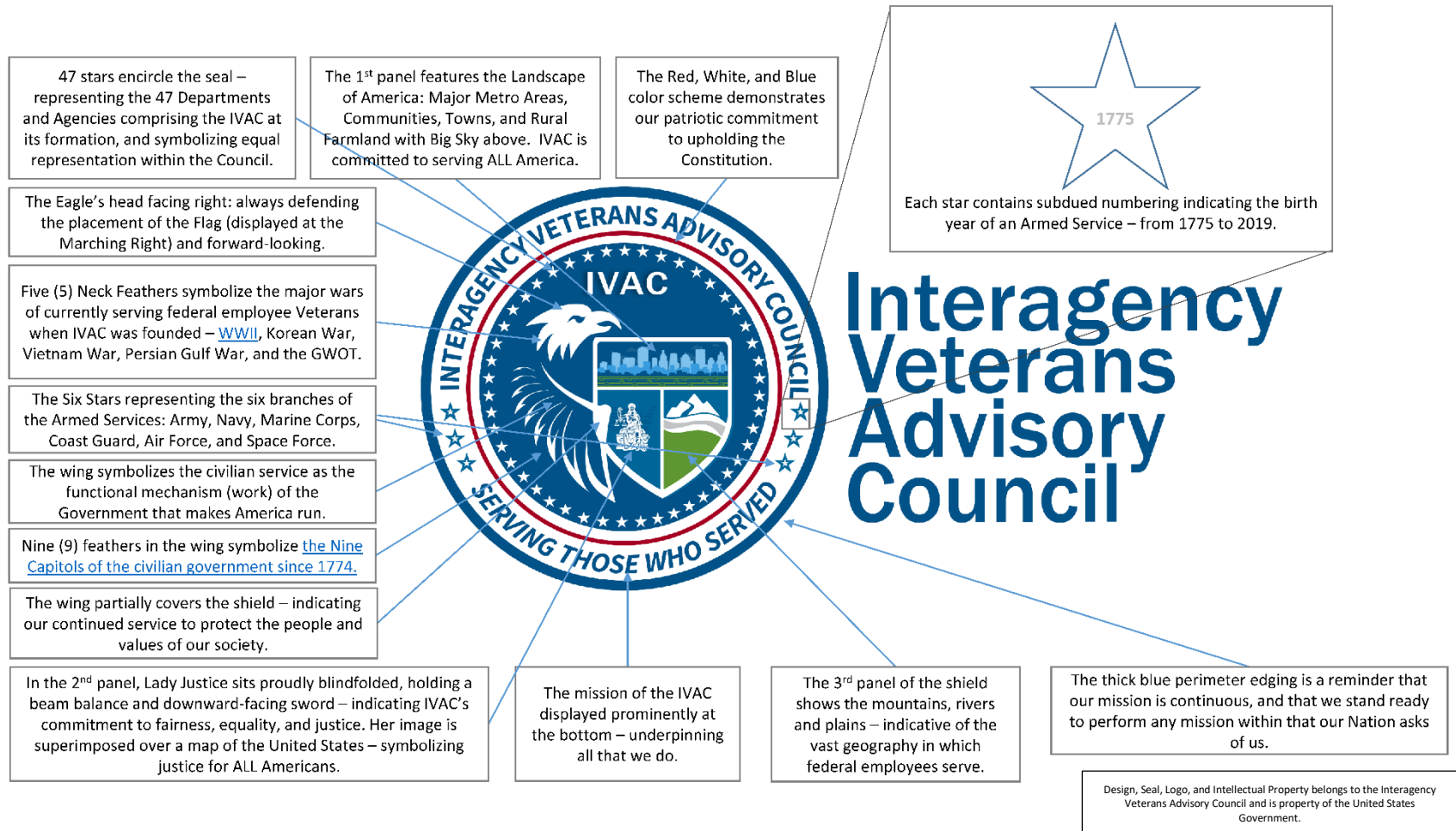
Walter Elmore

Walter Elmore
Vice Chair
Emeritus

Serving Those Who Served

Appendix B – Seal of the Interagency Veterans Advisory Council

Seal of the Interagency Veterans Advisory Council



Appendix C – Agency Resources

Below is a list of Agency Resources for Veterans.

| Agency | Resource | Topic |
|---|---|--------------------------------|
| Department of Veterans Affairs | eBenefits Portal https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage | VA Benefits |
| Department of Veterans Affairs | I CARE Core Values https://www.va.gov/icare/ | VA Mission |
| Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs | MyHealthVet Portal https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home | VA Healthcare Self-Service |
| Veterans Benefits Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs | Veterans Benefits and Resources from Other Federal Agencies https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/other-federal-benefits.asp | Federal Veteran Resources |
| Institute for Museum and Library Services | Supporting Veterans and Military Families: Understanding The Community https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/supporting-veterans-and-military-families-understanding.pdf | Military and Veteran Community |
| Department of Labor | Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/userra | Employment Rights |
| Office of Personnel Management | Veterans' Preference Guide https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/veterans-services/vet-guide-for-hr-professionals/ | Veterans' Preference |
| Department of Transportation | Veterans Transportation Career Center https://www.transportation.gov/veterantransportationcareers | Transferable Skills |

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