

Employers' Guide

TO WELCOMING AND SUPPORTING WOUNDED WARRIORS




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INTRODUCTION

Employers have come together to support veterans with disabilities that are transitioning into civilian work in significant numbers. However, transitioning to a new career in an unfamiliar civilian workplace can create challenges for veterans, who are just beginning to understand how their injuries may affect their performance and ability to adapt to the new career. The barriers to adjusting for those with ‘invisible’ disabilities, like post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, may be even more difficult to anticipate. When not fully supported in the workplace, both the veteran and the employer lose out. Veterans may endure ‘false starts’ as they adapt to civilian careers, while employers risk high rates of turnover and poor performance on the job for misunderstanding the needs of this group.

The National Organization on Disability, through its Wounded Warrior Careers and Return to Careers programs, has worked with hundreds of these veterans to understand how best to support them while in transition. Our cumulative experience in veterans’ career transition can assist employers to successfully welcome veterans into their workforce.



Through our on-the-ground veteran serving programs we have found that wounded warrior employment initiatives are most successful when approached through a deliberate process, similar to the hiring other individuals with disabilities. The process addresses four stages in the employment lifecycle: internal preparation, recruitment, onboarding and accommodations to retention strategies. Approaching the employment of veterans with disabilities as a holistic endeavor will help to ensure that these men and women have the tools and resources to be successful contributing members of the organization and bring their considerable talents and experience to bear for your company. Employers will reap the benefits in employee retention rates and levels of on-the-job satisfaction.

In this guide we introduce a structure for providing support for veterans in the workplace. The guide is intended as a primer on the basics of each step in the lifecycle of veterans' employment and offers suggestions on how to successfully design a veterans' employment system for your organization.



PREPARE

RECRUIT

ONBOARDING
& SUPPORT

RETAIN



PREPARE


It is important to lay the ground work within your company before beginning the recruiting process. This will help you to identify potential challenges and barriers that can be addressed in advance. The preparation process does not have to be prolonged, and it is not necessary to resolve every issue prior to moving on to the next step.

1 IDENTIFY SUPPORTERS

While it is ideal for support for veteran-inclusion to come from the top of the organization, we recognize that this is not always possible due to competing priorities. In our experience, we have also found that nothing will doom the effort to failure faster than a decision-maker who feels they are being forced to undertake a project that they are not wholly committed to. Who are the leaders or managers in your company that sincerely want to make hiring veterans a priority? What types of positions are they responsible for? Where are they located? What kinds of resources do they control to make the program a priority?

2 REVIEW PROCESSES

Now is a good time to review existing workforce policies and processes. Many valuable practices may already be in place to accommodate existing employees with disabilities. Areas to review include: What is your process for providing



workplace accommodations? If your company does not have internal staff to manage the process, can you identify an outside source to help recommend accommodations? What types of adaptive technology do your employees already use? Is the technology available to others who might need it? How accessible is the workplace? Is there public transportation available if needed? How is the workplace configured? Could it be changed if necessary to accommodate someone with psychological or cognitive impairment? How are absences managed? How are accommodations handled during the recruiting process?

3 ASSESS THE CULTURE

A cultural assessment will give you an opportunity to identify areas of the organization that will be more or less welcoming to veterans with disabilities. Do you have a veteran employee resource group? Is there a disability resource group? Do you have mentors to guide the new veteran through the on-boarding process and familiarize them with “how things work” at the company? Consider how flexible the organization can be. Many times veterans with disabilities must make follow-up appointments with their care team – are managers and supervisors willing to adapt? Do you provide training for managers and supervisors on working with veterans or people with disabilities?



RECRUIT

In most organizations the standard recruiting process is not well suited to hiring veterans, particularly those with serious disabilities. Veterans may lack an understanding of how to relate military qualifications to the civilian sector. In addition, those veterans with disabilities may not be completely aware of their current capabilities and challenges and how they might affect work life. Internship opportunities and individual coaching prior to a veterans exit from the military will help them get a better understanding of your organization, the jobs you have available and the work best suited to them. Organizations such as the [Northrop Grumman Network of Champions](#) provide opportunities for employers to meet with veterans early in the process.

1 FIND GOOD RECRUITING SOURCES FOR VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

One of the questions we are often asked is where can we find veterans with disabilities? Good sources include the each military branch's Warrior Transition Units, the Veterans Administration's regional Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment programs, Disabled Veteran Outreach programs via your local Workforce Centers. Remember that many veterans with disabilities may not identify themselves as disabled, so your recruiting materials may focus on positive veteran messaging.



2 START WITH THE VETERAN

We encourage organizations to consider “up-ending” the recruiting process, whereby job placements begin with the veteran rather than the empty position. As you get to know each veteran individually, employers will understand where their skills can contribute to your organization, what jobs can be a good fit, and how existing responsibilities could be modified to fit their strengths.

3 PROVIDE JOB PREVIEWS AND INTERNSHIPS

Offering job previews and internships are good ways for veterans with disabilities to find out if your organization and the job is a good fit for them. In some cases the VA or Department of Labor can pay many of the costs associated with these programs (contact the veteran specialist in your state’s department of labor).

4 ESTABLISH A VETERAN RECRUITING PROGRAM

Because of the significant differences between the way jobs are titled and organized in the military and civilian workplace having recruiters that are trained specifically to work with veterans can be essential to success. Organizations that have been successfully recruiting veterans have coaches that contact veterans when they apply for work to help them translate their skills to the jobs in the workplace. Automated skills translation tools can be helpful, but having a human touch is much more accurate and produces better results.



5 EMPHASIZE JOB FIT, NOT NUMBERS

Understand that this is not an employment program that can easily be measured by the number of veterans with disabilities hired in a year. Veterans with serious disabilities require a more customized process that should be measured in performance, productivity and retention. A well-considered veterans' employment program will have greater success in numbers than one seeking to fill a quota without attention to special supports and accommodations.



ONBOARDING & SUPPORT

Successful programs for hiring veterans with disabilities recognize that the process doesn't begin and end with the job offer. Veterans with disabilities, as with many individuals with disabilities, require specialized attention during the onboarding process. During this time the employer needs to communicate actively with the veteran and assess whether the position they have been hired in is the right position, whether the supervisor has the right skills, and whether another position or supervisor might be a better fit. Areas to consider include:

1 COMPREHENSIVE ON-BOARDING

The military and civilian workplaces have significant differences. Consider, for instance, that the military system is designed to rapidly onboard new members either when first assigned or transferred. Starting with a new company affects every aspect of the veterans' life including where they live, how they eat, access to healthcare, and how to act and dress appropriately. Unlike the military, there are no training exercises for these new circumstances in the civilian world. For a transitioning veteran the amount of information provided when starting a job can be overwhelming. Moreover those adapting to a newly acquired disability, especially one with cognitive or psychological impacts, will face even more challenges in adapting to a new workplace. Providing a more structured on-



boarding process helps to acclimatize the veteran to the workplace more quickly and to accelerate their productivity.

2 PROVIDE TRAINED MENTORS

Mentors, or sponsors, are a part of the military experience – they assist a newly transferred service member to adapt to their new assignment and answer the many questions that one might be reluctant to ask a supervisor or manager. We encourage you to provide training to mentors of veterans with disabilities to help them identify any problems early. This training should include information about adaptive technology, requesting accommodations, the use of the EAP, and who to contact in the organization for additional assistance.

3 ACCOMMODATE SUPPORT NEEDS

Most veterans are reluctant to ask for help. They are trained to be independent and to solve problems themselves, so it is necessary to design a support system that's easy to tap into. Additionally, many veterans with disabilities aren't fully aware of the range of support that is available to them. Accommodations can include everything from flexible schedules to software, coaching, checklists, adaptive technology, and many other low cost tools to help them be successful. We recommend establishing a centralized budget for accommodations to remove any departmental financial barriers to providing them.



4 BE PROACTIVE AND FLEXIBLE

Most managers, supervisors, and human resource professionals have been encouraged to wait until an individual asked for an accommodation rather than proactively offer it. One idea is to offer all veterans with disabilities a “package” of accommodations from which they can choose the best solution for their particular situation.



RETAIN

After having devoted the time and attention to hiring the right veteran with disabilities for your organization and determining the best accommodations for their situation, employers will naturally want to retain that individual to ensure return on time invested. Successfully executed retention strategies also deliver results by ensuring veterans have an opportunity to be successful in their careers while contributing to the organization's overall success. Retention strategies are most likely a stage in your existing talent management systems, but here we offer some advice to ensure that you fully engage veterans.

1 ESTABLISH A CLEAR CAREER PATH

The military provides a structured career path that helps the member understand where their career is headed and metrics to determine if they are on the pathway to success. Civilian career paths are not as clear as the military system. However, providing the veteran with a concept of where their work will take them is a helpful way for them to judge and assess their career path.

2 PROVIDE TRAINING

Training, both formal and informal, is a necessary part of a career path. Veterans with disabilities will be more comfortable in an organization that provides



training to help them succeed. Formal training is less common in the civilian world than it is in the military; emphasizing the importance of informal on-the-job training can help clarify that training and learning is taking place.

3 ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION IN EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS

The military is a team environment. Many veterans report that they miss the camaraderie of the military and the importance of having friends at work can't be overlooked. Engaging veterans with disabilities in workplace groups such as a veterans' employee resource group can make them feel welcome and connected. Mentors, especially, should encourage participation.

4 CHECK IN AND PROVIDE FREQUENT PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

Performance feedback is essential to developing a retention program. Veterans are familiar with receiving frequent performance feedback, and although they may be reluctant to ask for feedback it is a valuable tool to encourage their engagement. Make sure that there is ample opportunity for positive, as well as negative input and provide a format for two way discussion. If the veteran with disabilities does not seem to be succeeding in their current job, consider job modifications, a different position, or a different supervisor.

Acknowledgments

Hiring and supporting veterans who have been injured in service to their country is a worthwhile and rewarding endeavor. The National Organization on Disability and the organizations that fund us thank you for making the effort to serve those who have served. If you find that you require additional assistance please feel free to contact us at info@nod.org.

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About

THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY

The National Organization on Disability (NOD) is a private, non-profit organization that promotes the full participation and contributions of America's 56 million people with disabilities in all aspects of life. Today, NOD focuses on increasing employment opportunities for the 79 percent of working-age Americans with disabilities who are not employed.

Founded in 1982, NOD is one of the oldest cross-disability organizations in the country, and remains one of the few organizations committed to representing all Americans with disabilities, regardless of their particular condition or circumstances.

LEARN MORE

More information on the Wounded Warrior Careers program, as well as our other disability employment programs is available on our website at www.NOD.org.

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