On Thursday, July 24, 2014, the George W. Bush Institute’s Military Service Initiative and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Hiring Our Heroes program hosted a cross-sector forum about veteran and transitioning service member employment in America. Within the context of “Expanding Collective Impact,” senior military leaders and government representatives joined executives from more than 40 companies to map the transition process and employment pathways for these groups. The fruits of the discussion, and continued dialogue since, are presented in this Veteran Employment Transition Roadmap. Future roadmaps will be created for other military populations, including spouses, members of the Guard and Reserve, wounded warriors, and caregivers.
We would like to thank the following companies and organizations for their attendance at the July 24, 2014, event, their thoughtful contributions to this Roadmap, and their commitment to transitioning service members, veterans, and their families around the world:

3M
100,000 Jobs Mission
API Group
Bank of America
Blackstone
Booz Allen Hamilton
Call of Duty Endowment
Capital One
Citi
Deloitte LLP
FASTPORT
First Command Financial Services
First Data Corporation
Fluor
GE
General Motors
Hilton Worldwide
Hospital Corporation of America
Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University
International Franchise Association
JCPenney
JPMorgan Chase & Co.
Joining Forces
Kraft Foods
La Quinta Inns & Suites
Lockheed Martin
Merck
Michaels Stores
MilitaryOneClick
Niemi Center at Southern Methodist University’s Cox School of Business
Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
Office of the Secretary of Defense, Transition to Veterans Program Office
PeopleScout
Prudential
Ryder
ScoutComms
SunTrust
Toyota
U.S. Army Installation Management Command
U.S. Army Reserve
U.S. Army Soldier for Life
U.S. Department of Labor
University of Phoenix
USAA

The George W. Bush Institute and Hiring Our Heroes would like to extend special thanks to the fellows at the Niemi Center at Southern Methodist University’s Cox School of Business, Deloitte LLP, and IVMF at Syracuse University for their contributions to this effort.
Since 9/11, more than 2.5 million Americans have worn the uniform, and over the next five years, more than 1 million service members will transition to civilian life. They have faced down our enemies, protected our country, and demonstrated the courage, resilience, and adaptability that are hallmarks of the American military. Our businesses and communities need their leadership, experience, and character, but the transition to civilian life and employment can bring new challenges.

The recent trend for veteran employment has been positive, with most veterans eventually successfully transitioning into the civilian workplace. A slow but steady economic recovery has also improved the job outlook for all veterans. Post-9/11 veterans, however, have broadly experienced greater difficulty with securing and sustaining civilian employment than their non-veteran peers. While there has been significant progress in addressing veterans’ unemployment, challenges remain, including:

- A communication and culture gap between veteran job seekers and employers
- Lack of military service member preparedness for finding civilian employment
- Stigma related to mental health concerns and ongoing service commitments (National Guard and Reserve components)
- Ability of both veterans and employers to match and translate military skills, qualifications, and experience to civilian job requirements
- Barriers stemming from credentialing and licensing requirements
- Financial instability and veteran acclimation to civilian life and workplace

A collective effort across federal agencies, private industries, and nonprofit organizations, combined with strong support from the American people, has brought national attention and resourcing to the issue.

While most veterans successfully transition from the military into civilian career fields, the process takes time and hard work, and there are challenges for every transitioning service member. Many are uncertain as to how to plan, what to do, where to go, and who to turn to for guidance on establishing a career path and finding meaningful civilian employment. This transition can be overwhelming, as transitioning service members may experience gaps and overlaps in services available to them or confusion in navigating the multitude of online portals, tools, programs, job boards, veteran employment sites, and many veteran-serving nonprofit organizations in the “noisy” veteran employment landscape.
The George W. Bush Institute’s Military Service Initiative (MSI) partnered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Hiring Our Heroes program to work with a host of public, private, and nonprofit sector partners to capture and consolidate the essential steps transitioning service members and veterans must take to do their part to bridge the gap between supply and demand. By clearly and concisely illustrating the employment transition process for warriors, this coalition seeks to educate, inform, empower, and call to action all key stakeholders in how they can help close the veteran employment gap and narrow the civilian-military divide.
Of course, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to transition from military service to civilian life. Service members possess a wide array of skills, talents, experiences, and interests, and those factors, along with many others, play an important role in shaping their ultimate career destination. Yet the process for getting there—the “roadmap” for transitioning to a meaningful civilian career—is remarkably similar across rank, background, and level of experience. The VET Roadmap outlines the essential phases to assist a transitioning service member or veteran as he or she prepares for employment in the civilian sector, locates a potential employer, secures an offer for meaningful employment, and successfully transitions into the civilian workforce.

Each phase is divided into supportive themes, each central to completing specific portions of the transition process. The VET Roadmap is applied depends on the individual service member or veteran, and each employment transition journey must be tailored to his or her unique needs, circumstances, goals, and objectives.

The purpose of the Veteran Employment Transition (VET) Roadmap is to provide transitioning service members and veterans a resource so that they are better equipped to navigate that landscape and succeed in the civilian workforce. The VET Roadmap captures and consolidates essential steps with best-in-class resources and tools. It is not intended to replace existing efforts, but to clarify the process and aggregate the most effective resources at transitioning service members’ disposal from across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

A successful transition is an individual responsibility that requires understanding, planning, and deliberate execution—something familiar to everyone who has worn the uniform. The VET Roadmap will help transitioning service members and veterans take that ownership and responsibility. How the VET Roadmap is applied depends on the individual service member or veteran, and each employment transition journey must be tailored to his or her unique needs, circumstances, goals, and objectives.

The VET Roadmap is not designed as a stand-alone tool, but aims to provide a firm foundation upon which a veteran can build an employment transition strategy and act. It also identifies some best-in-class tools, resources, and organizations that veterans can leverage throughout the employment transition process.
PHASE 1: PREPARE

BENEFITS DISCOVERY
As a veteran, you are entitled to an array of benefits, services, and resources to foster a successful transition and civilian career. Benefits discovery should be a continuous process as circumstances and plans change. The majority of veteran benefits are derived through federal organizations. Others may be derived through veteran-serving nonprofit organizations, the business community, and state and local governments. Many resources, organizations, and services exist to help you understand and apply for your full scope of benefits.

SKILLS ASSESSMENT
You must assess, understand, and articulate the value you bring to a prospective employer. You possess training, education, experience, certification, licensure, and “valued” skills that civilian employers need but do not necessarily understand. Skills assessment helps detail an extensive list of the competencies, education, training, certification, licensure, and experience you gained while on active duty, in previous employment, or while conducting volunteer work. Savvy civilian employers look for “valued” skills that include leadership, management, problem-solving, situational awareness, judgment, decision-making, teamwork, work ethic, and core values. Seek the help of a civilian mentor, workforce development professional, or transition assistance adviser to articulate your skills in a manner that civilian employers will value. It is important to remember that no skills translation software program will adequately capture what a veteran brings to a company. You must learn to effectively translate those skills and attributes.

STRATEGIC PLANNING
Much like any military mission, the transition process requires a tremendous amount of planning, preparation, and time for execution. Your strategic plan should take into account variables such as acquired skills, career ambitions, level of education, formal training, required additional credentials or training to meet career goals, family planning, health and wellness, geography restrictions, benefits, and personal priorities. Finding and leveraging veteran and civilian mentors is essential to planning and navigating a successful transition. Being financially ready is also a key part of the plan. Furthermore, you can better understand total economic opportunity by opening your aperture and examining whether a position in a company may lead to longer-term opportunities with more pay and responsibilities. The strategic plan is a constantly evolving “life plan,” and should be reviewed periodically.

focus point

KNOW YOUR GOALS AND PLANNING FACTORS
Where do you or your family want to live? How much do you need to make? Will the job give you a sense of purpose and belonging? What industries are a good fit for your skill sets? Do you need additional training or education for your dream job? Are your goals realistic based on a host of factors such as the benefits available to you, tools at your disposal, and the needs, wants, and desires of you and your family?

PHASE 1 CHECKLIST

☐ Own your transition—it starts and ends with you and your family
☐ Plan and prepare for civilian employment like you did for any military mission or operation
☐ Define your mission (identify near- and long-term objectives and what it will take to get there)
☐ Create a timeline—and start early (ideally 12–24 months before separation)
☐ Know your new operating environment—research and understand the job market where you live, what employers are looking for, and how to best position your skill sets in the civilian market
☐ When assessing a possible job, look at it from a near- and long-term perspective to understand how it may lead to more opportunities in the future
☐ Perform a “gap analysis” by assessing your current skills and qualifications and then translate them into civilian-speak
☐ Decide whether schooling or credentialing is needed for your ideal job
☐ Be financially ready, and understand financial planning and management as a civilian
☐ Find mentors—both veteran and civilian—and ask for help
Be financially prepared. USAA recommends having six to nine months’ living expenses in a savings account in order to prepare. Bank of America also notes that “searching for a job often includes traveling for interviews, relocating your family, and upgrading your wardrobe.”

TIP #2

Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s ‘Message to the Force,’ June 2015

NOTE #1

Maintain reasonable expectations. “Don’t expect to make as much or supervise as many without first proving yourself. Many successfully transitioned veterans have told us that they took a pay cut and supervised far fewer people when they first transitioned into the civilian sector.”
PHASE 2: TRANSITION

VALUE PROPOSITION
You must develop a clear statement of the tangible results an employer would receive from hiring you. This statement should include an explanation of what differentiates you (without using acronyms or military terminology) and clearly relate military experience or volunteer work to the desired career field. The most successful job seekers understand how their experience meshes with the needs of a prospective employer. A clear value proposition will inform your marketing, networking, and ability to “close” an employment opportunity.

MARKETING AND NETWORKING
Marketing and networking help you improve your image and reputation to advance your career opportunities. Marketing conveys your personal brand and value proposition to prospective employers through your resume, elevator pitch, and interview skills. Use of free resume review services, career coaches, mentors, and mock interviews can help “close the deal” when marketing efforts produce job leads. Networking is essential to develop contacts, leads, and referrals for employment opportunities and must be treated as a profession to be effective. Consider your peers, past supervisors, and subordinates as individuals in your network. Follow-up is critical to both marketing and networking. Emails, handwritten thank-you notes, and, in some cases where appropriate, phone calls are all ways to bring positive attention to your career search.

TARGETING
“Targeting” is the process of finding, negotiating, and accepting a meaningful and financially viable employment opportunity. Initiating a “targeting cycle” allows you to find and evaluate job opportunities and decide on which to accept. Finding a full-time job is a full-time job. You have to allocate the necessary time, research, and effort to find the job that matches your goals, objectives, and personal planning factors. Learn about expected pay bands, items that are appropriate to negotiate, and effective negotiating techniques. A successful job search often requires you to look beyond the surface and consider the long-term opportunity in the industry and the position. In some cases, you may need to take a job that is a step below your target job or explore part-time or temporary work to get the necessary civilian experience. While not always ideal, these opportunities get your foot in the door and send a clear message that you are committed to working and will do whatever it takes to get the job done. In the event you are not hired, ask for feedback to learn critical information such as how to improve, find a better fit, further develop interview skills, or enhance skill sets.

DON’T BE AFRAID TO FOCUS ON “I” AND “ME”
When talking with civilian employers, many transitioning service members make the mistake of focusing on their military team rather than their individual work and skills. This makes it difficult for employers to evaluate your value to their organization. For example, say: “In 2006, I was a fire team leader in Iraq. The job required us to search houses with known insurgents. My role was to manage all aspects of my four-person team. I was responsible for determining when we entered houses, taking the safest approach, and making sure that all was clear. My attention to detail is critical and can have positive implications for your business.”

Focus Point

PHASE 2 CHECKLIST

- Be “all in”—remember that looking for a full-time job is a full-time job—and be resilient—it is hard work
- Create a strong personal brand and develop a personal “value proposition”—why a company should hire you
- Communicate your value through effective resume, elevator pitch, and interview skills—rehearse, rehearse, rehearse!
- Cast a wide net—know where and how to look for job opportunities and consider locations to publish your resume, online tools that highlight your capabilities (e.g., LinkedIn), and use of placement agencies
- Build a network and make connections in order to develop contacts, leads, and referrals for employment opportunities and advancement; although something you might not be accustomed to in the military, networking is essential to civilian career success
- Allocate the necessary time to research, write emails, prepare for interviews, and other day-to-day facets of searching for a job; ensure follow-up and be proactive
- Use proper grammar and complete sentences when communicating with employers, even when you are communicating via email
- Widen your search for jobs slightly outside your interest or target geographic locations
- Work part time, find temporary work, or look for volunteer opportunities during your search
- Explore internships and fellowship opportunities
- Learn how, and what, to negotiate before you accept
- Assess and reassess your situation to ensure previously defined goals and objectives are realistic
NOTES

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**TIP #1**
Networking is critical. As part of its “commitment to help veterans connect with available jobs across America, LinkedIn offers U.S. veterans a free one-year Job Seeker Premium account.”

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**TIP #2**
Rehearse. “Practice for interviews, and in doing so, prepare to convey with confidence the skills and traits you’ve learned in the military.”

*Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s ‘Message to the Force,’ June 2015*
PHASE 3: LEAD

CULTURAL COMPETENCY
Just as you learned the customs, culture, and languages where you deployed in order to accomplish your military missions, you must learn the same about your new place of employment in order to succeed. You should never assume that a new organization understands the military. Just as you expect the organization to learn about you, your background, and the military mindset, you should learn about the organization’s unique work culture, languages, processes, systems, and customs. You should get to know the different employees on your new team and in your community. You should avoid using military jargon and acronyms and try not to call everyone “sir” or “ma’am.”

CONNECTING
Many large companies have veteran affinity or business resource groups that are great places to start connecting or find a mentor. If a company does not have such a group, a veteran, someone who has a special affinity toward veterans (e.g., someone whose parent was a veteran or whose sibling is in the military), or tenured personnel can provide valuable guidance and can often serve as your champion within a company. Teach, train, and educate your civilian colleagues about military service and culture to help bridge the civilian-military divide in your organization. Networking is a lifetime commitment. To grow in the civilian sector, you must seek out and grow valuable relationships and make new connections with people and organizations that can help not only you, but your new team as well.

LEAD AND SUCCEED
The same core values, principles, and leadership techniques that made you successful in the military will apply as a civilian, but legal and formal authorities will likely be different. A different environment and culture may necessitate a shift from authoritative to influence-based leadership styles that include leveraging skills such as communication, the ability to motivate others, and adaptation of one’s management style to apply to an individual’s job position. Many co-workers will hold veterans to a higher standard. The time after landing a new job is not the time to rest on one’s laurels. Continue professional development by taking classes and enrolling in online courses or trade schools. Like networking, education of different varieties can and should be continuous. Your new company may not have the same formal training, education, and professional development and career management structure you had in the military. You may have to take a more proactive role in managing your own development and career advancement.

PHASE 3 CHECKLIST

- Learn the organization’s work culture and core values and get to know your team
- Connect—engage socially and professionally (e.g., affinity groups, business resource groups, etc.) to discover new opportunities and valuable relationships
- Find a mentor in your new organization
- Make networking a lifetime commitment
- Seek regular feedback and continue to train, develop, and grow by finding ways to better yourself in your new profession
- Serve as a mentor or volunteer with nonprofit organizations to help fellow service members during their transitions
- Succeed—demonstrate the value of veterans to the civilian workforce

LEAD AND SUCCEED
Pave the way for future transitioning veterans by laying the groundwork and making the case that hiring a veteran is a good business practice. Consider serving as a mentor or volunteer with nonprofit organizations to help fellow service members during their transition.
In many companies, “you’re likely to find co-workers who formerly served in the military. They can mentor you as you ease into a new working environment.”

Military.com
VETERAN EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION ROADMAP: QUICK GUIDE AND RESOURCES

PHASE 1
PREPARE

BENEFITS DISCOVERY

- Schedule to attend, along with your spouse, a Transition Assistance Program (TAP) course at least six months prior to terminal leave. All Transition GPS courses and curricula can be viewed at dodtap.mil/virtual_curriculum.html.
- Some of the services have their own transition programs like the Army’s Soldier for Life program (soldierforlife.army.mil) and the Marine Corps’ Marine for Life program (marineforlife.org). These websites have a library of resources and benefits that can aid in the transition.
- Search online for “Department of Veterans Affairs benefits” for your state, city, or county when you are deciding where to move. Many offices have extensive websites to lay out all of your benefits.
- The location of VA health care facilities may be an important factor in your decision-making. Visit va.gov/directory/guide.
- Many veteran service organizations like Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the American Legion, and Disabled American Veterans (DAV) can help you with your benefits.
- Find a veteran service organization representative to help you file your claim at va.gov/vso.
- If you have disabilities, review the Institute for Veterans and Military Families’ (IVMF) guide at vets.syr.edu/pdfs/benefits-guidebook.pdf

SKILLS ASSESSMENT

- A Joint Services Transcript will be important in translating your skills and obtaining college credit. Visit https://jst.doded.mil for a free transcript.
- Several online tools translate military service into civilian terms. Those tools include Hiring Our Heroes’ resumeengine.org, military.com’s Skills Translator, and the VA’s translator at ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/jobs. In addition to using these tools, ask a civilian mentor or career coach to assist you with skills translation.
- Understand your interests and how your skills may translate to the civilian sector. Complete an “interest profile” at mynextmove.org/explore/ip or hirepurpose.com.
- The VA and Department of Labor (DOL) also offer free career counseling. Visit your local VA office or American Job Center (servicelocator.org) to schedule an appointment.
- Consider whether you are better suited to own your own business. IVMF has tremendous opportunities for entrepreneurial-minded veterans including training programs and other resources. Visit vets.syr.edu.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

- The VA’s Veterans Employment Center is the government portal for transition planning and resource guides.
- JP Morgan Chase & Co.’s 100,000 Jobs Mission has a “Transition Field Guide” that serves as a deliberate planning guide.
- Research jobs by industry and location at Hiring Our Heroes’ Fast Track (fasttrackforheroes.org) and mynextmove.org. Other resources include USAA’s Best Places for Veterans.
- Connect with one of the nearly 2,500 American Job Centers (AJCs) nationwide to assist you in researching a specific job market. Find your local AJC at servicelocator.org.
- Organizations like Hire Heroes USA provide employment transition workshops, personalized career coaching, and employment preparation counseling at hireheroesusa.org.
- A mentor is essential to the planning and transition process. Organizations like American Corporate Partners can connect you with civilian mentors at no cost at acp-usa.org.
- Higher education is a great option for veterans with the GI Bill. You can review your educational needs at the U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Libraries and/or look for schools at the VA’s GI Bill “School Locator.” Join a Student Veterans of America chapter once you get on campus.
- VetNet is a platform developed by Google (vetnethq.com) and provides three tracks of information for transitioning service members: basic training on resume development; career connection and industry-specific information; and entrepreneurship.
- The DOD SkillBridge (dodskillbridge.com) also connects employers with transitioning service members.
- Make sure that you are financially ready. Companies like Bank of America, Capital One, Citi, First Command, and USAA provide financial planning tools for service members and their families. Conduct an Internet search for “financial planning” and “military transition” for good information.
PHASE 2
TRANSITION

VALUE PROPOSITION
• The key to a successful transition depends on a veteran’s ability to brand his or her service in civilian terms. Sites like Hiring Our Heroes’ resumeengine.org can help you make that translation.
• A good resume also plays a key role in establishing your value proposition. Resume tips are available at military.com, the VA’s Veterans Employment Center, and the DOL’s careeronestop.org.
• Some nonprofits and government agencies provide great one-on-one career guidance and support. Organizations like Hire Heroes USA and Corporate America Supports You, as well as the DOL’s American Job Centers, can help you build your personal brand.

MARKETING AND NETWORKING
• Build a profile on LinkedIn (veterans.linkedin.com) and connect with those you already know. For good advice on how to create a powerful LinkedIn profile, search online for “LinkedIn military profiles.” Use your LinkedIn profile to search for employees with whom you share common experiences. Those experiences may be related to your military service, personal relationships (friends and families), and educational institutions. Don’t be afraid to ask others for advice.
• Find and recruit a mentor to assist you in crafting an effective resume, building your personal brand, networking, and marketing yourself to potential employers. American Corporate Partners and eMentor are great no-cost resources.
• Use online networking platforms such as RallyPoint, LinkedIn, Unite US, or Facebook to find veterans in the geographic region in which you want to live. Contact these veterans and request their assistance in helping you to build a broader network.
• Consider joining a member-based, veteran-serving nonprofit organization such as Team Red, White and Blue, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, or Team Rubicon, among others. Explore and utilize the multitude of tools these organizations offer and talk to fellow members about how they navigated their transition.

TARGETING
• Search for jobs online at the VA’s Veterans Employment Center, monster.com, idealist.com, and indeed.com, or usajobs.gov for government positions.
• Search veteran-specific sites like the 100,000 Jobs Mission, the Blackstone Group, or military.com. Leverage DOL American Job Centers, state and local chambers of commerce, and state veteran employment initiatives.
• Attend hiring fairs hosted by Hiring Our Heroes, and follow up with the recruiters you meet.
• Recruiting firms may also be a good option for junior military officers (JMOs) and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) with strong academic credentials. Firms like Cameron-Brooks, Bradley-Morris, Orion International, and Lucas Group place thousands of transitioning JMOs and NCOs each year.
• Use Glassdoor to understand what it is like to work at certain organizations—pay, culture, employee satisfaction—and that can help inform what questions to ask in an interview.

PHASE 3
LEAD

CULTURAL COMPETENCY
• Some skills training programs integrate education in the “valued” skills necessary to succeed in the corporate environment. IVMF’s “Veterans Career Transition Program” is another great resource.

CONNECTING
• Many companies have veteran affinity groups, like Disney’s Heroes Work Here, designed to bridge the transition gap and provide mentors inside the company.
• Some nonprofits can foster a sense of purpose and community connectedness—the VFW, American Legion, Team RWB, Team Rubicon, and The Mission Continues are a few. Find veteran-serving nonprofit organizations in your community at uniteus.com.

LEAD AND SUCCEED
• Some employers provide employees an annual budget for professional development workshops, or you can use your GI Bill for additional courses to continue your professional development.
• The National Resource Directory and Unite US can help connect you with a complete range of transition resources and services for you and your family.
• Consider serving as a mentor or volunteer with nonprofit organizations to help fellow service members during their transitions.

FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF RESOURCES, GO TO HIRINGOURHEROES.ORG/VETROADMAP
“There is no doubt in my mind this generation of veterans is as great as any group of veterans before. There’s no doubt in my mind they will be leaders in the years to come for our nation. And there’s no doubt in my mind that as a result of their leadership, America will continue to be the greatest country on the face of the Earth.”

— President George W. Bush