

THE 2026 VETERAN TRANSITION GUIDE

**From Service to Success: A Practical
Employer Handbook**

Prepared by CCS GlobalTech



The Opportunity You're Missing

Here's something most HR leaders don't realize right now, roughly 200,000 service members are transitioning out of the military this year alone. They're landing interviews, getting offers, and then struggling.

Not because they can't do the work. In fact, 59% of employers report that veterans perform better than their non-veteran peers. They struggle because most civilian employers don't know how to translate military experience into corporate success.

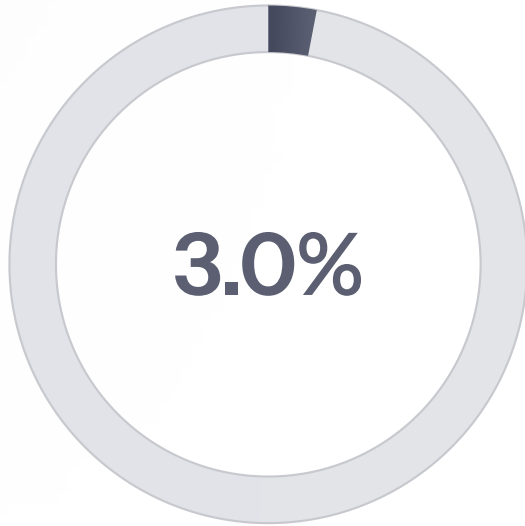
This guide changes that.

We're going to show you exactly how to turn veteran hiring from a nice-to-have into a competitive advantage. No corporate speak. No empty gestures. Just practical strategies that work.



Why This Matters Now

The Numbers Tell the Story:



Unemployment rate for veterans, compared to 3.9% for non-veterans. This highlights their strong employment potential.



Service members transitioning out of the military annually, representing a significant talent pool ready for new challenges.

What This Costs You:

When you hire veterans without proper onboarding and support structures, they leave federal jobs at higher rates than non-veterans 6.7% versus 5% annually. In their first five years, that gap widens to 18.7% versus 11.1%.

But when you do it right? Companies with strong veteran programs report retention rates around **80%**.

The difference isn't the veterans. It's how you bring them in.

What Veterans Actually Bring to Your Team

Let's cut through the platitudes. Yes, veterans have "leadership skills" and "discipline." But what does that actually mean for your bottom line?



Security Clearances

An active security clearance saves you months of background checks, thousands in vetting costs, and provides immediate access to sensitive work. For federal contractors, this alone changes your bidding capacity.



Technical Expertise

Today's military runs on advanced systems—from aircraft and cybersecurity networks to precision logistics and medical technology. These aren't soft skills. These are engineers, network administrators, and systems architects.



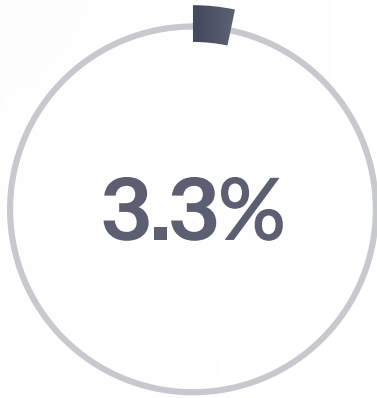
Mission-Focused Leadership

Military service develops leaders at every rank—from managing small teams under pressure to coordinating large-scale operations. They've led in situations where mistakes have real consequences.



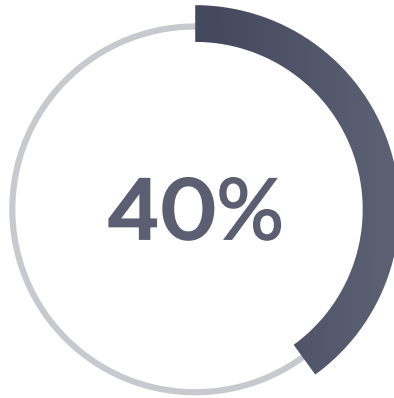
The Education Advantage

Veterans with college degrees are proven performers.



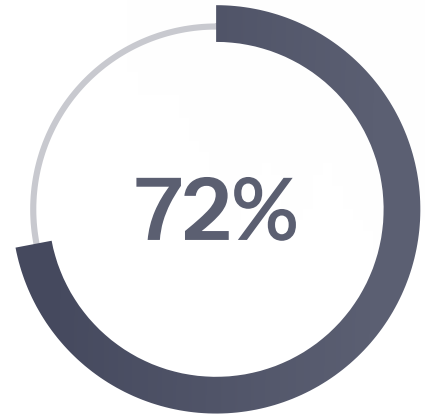
Unemployment Rate

for veterans with college degrees.



Management Roles

of veterans work in management and professional occupations.



Success Rate

for student veterans in higher education, with higher GPAs.

Where They Go (And Why It Matters)

Veterans with specialized military training have higher civilian earnings than infantry veterans. For example, Army operational intelligence specialists typically earn \$55,000 in their first year, while infantry veterans average \$33,000.

Translation: match the right veteran to the right role, and they excel.

The largest shares of veterans work in administrative and support services (16%), professional services (15% for Air Force veterans), and federal government jobs (15%).

The Two Programs Changing The Game

If you're serious about veteran hiring, you need to know about these two Department of Defense programs. They're not complicated, and they work.



DOD SkillBridge: Your 180-Day Audition

Discover how the SkillBridge program empowers transitioning service members and benefits your organization:

01

Start 180 Days Out

Service members begin internships, apprenticeships, or training programs during their final six months of service.

02

Gain Real-World Experience

They work with your organization, receiving full military pay and benefits, ensuring no labor cost to you.

03

Connect with 3,000+ Partners

SkillBridge connects them to a vast network of public and private organizations, including yours.

It's a test drive. For both of you.

The Practical Side:

- Eligible service members must have completed at least 180 continuous days on active duty and can complete the program within their final 180 days of military service with commander approval.
- Companies offering SkillBridge opportunities include Amazon, John Deere, Lockheed Martin, UnitedHealth Group, and hundreds more across all industries.
- Veterans who complete SkillBridge internships with veteran preference and non-competitive hiring authority eligibility may receive job offers, though participation doesn't guarantee employment.

The conversion rate? High enough that companies with their own SkillBridge programs report impressively high job offer rates.

COOL Programs: Credentials That Matter

COOL stands for Credentialing Opportunities On-Line. It's a DOD-wide program that helps service members earn industry-recognized licenses, certifications, and apprenticeships. Each military branch has its own COOL website.



Industry Credentials

Service members earn industry-recognized licenses, certifications, and apprenticeships directly linked to civilian careers.



Financial Support

Up to \$4,500 annually for training, exams, books, materials, and recertification across 1,600+ career specialties.



Civilian Career Alignment

Branch-specific programs map military training to valuable civilian credentials, ensuring a seamless transition.



Ready-to-Work Talent

Veterans arrive with pre-funded, industry-specific expertise (e.g., CISSP, PMP), speaking your industry's language from day one.

Building Your Veteran Hiring Program: The Practical Steps

Forget the corporate initiative. Here's what actually works.

01

Fix Your Job Descriptions

Military job titles don't translate. A "Fire Control Technician" isn't fighting fires—they're maintaining complex weapons systems. An "Intelligence Analyst" does data analysis, not spy work.

02

Tap Into The Right Channels

The Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment Coordinators bridge skill gaps between employers and veterans—they're talent matchmakers, not just job posters.

03

Understand Federal Hiring Advantages

If you're a federal contractor or agency, you have special tools like Veterans' Preference and special hiring authorities.

04

Structure Your Onboarding

This is where most companies fail. They hire the veteran, hand them an employee handbook, and wonder why things feel off.

05

Support Beyond Day One

Membership programs, veteran employee resource groups, and onboarding support boost team morale and increase efficiency.



Step 1: Fix Your Job Descriptions



List the actual skills and tasks, not just job titles



Use the DOD's Military Crosswalk tool to understand military occupational specialties



Partner with your local American Job Center to post vacancies at no cost and get help translating requirements



Focus on competencies, not credentials

The shift to skills-based hiring (which means you don't necessarily need a degree) offers significant opportunities to transitioning military members.



Step 2: Tap Into The Right Channels

Where To Find Qualified Candidates:

DOD SkillBridge Authorized Organizations portal

Programs like Hiring Our Heroes, American Corporate Partners (ACP), and Hire Heroes USA

USAJOBS and state veteran employment offices

Company-specific internship programs

If your goal is veteran recruiting, you must be able to source and evaluate veterans. Companies laying off veteran recruitment teams are making a big mistake.



Step 3: Understand Federal Hiring Advantages

If you're a federal contractor or agency, you have special tools.

1

Veterans' Preference

Veterans who served on active duty and were honorably discharged may receive preference over non-veteran applicants. The system awards points for military service and service-connected disabilities.

2

Veterans Recruitment Appointment (VRA)

Allows hiring eligible veterans without competition to positions through GS-11.

3

30% or More Disabled Veterans Authority

Non-competitive hiring for veterans with significant service-connected disabilities.

4

Veterans Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA)

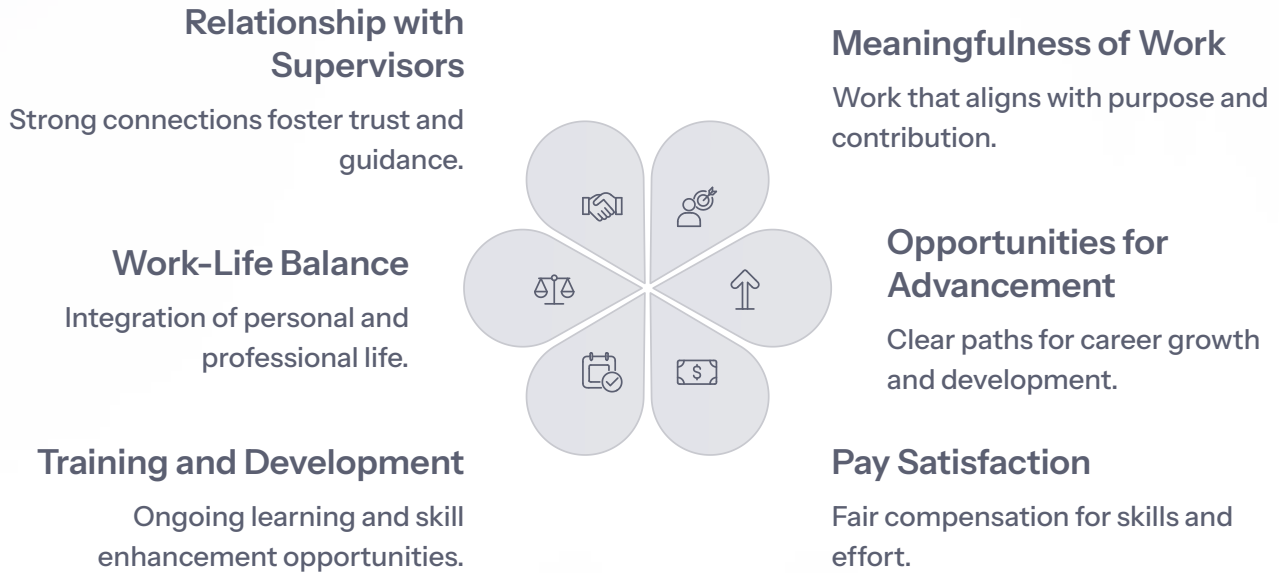
Gives eligible veterans access to jobs typically only open to current federal employees.

Veterans now make up about 31% of the federal workforce, significantly higher than their representation in the general population.

Step 4: Structure Your Onboarding

This is where most companies fail. They hire the veteran, hand them an employee handbook, and wonder why things feel off.

What Veterans Need (That Others Don't):



Veterans report slightly less satisfaction with these factors than non-veterans, which partly explains higher attrition rates.

The Solution:

- 1 Assign a Mentor**
Not an HR person. Someone who's been there, who understands the transition.
- 2 Translate the Culture**
Corporate politics aren't intuitive. Neither is "working the room" at networking events. Teach it explicitly.
- 3 Create Clear Advancement Paths**
Over half of both veterans and non-veterans report dissatisfaction with advancement opportunities. Show them the roadmap.
- 4 Regular Check-ins**
Monthly for the first six months. Not performance reviews—connection points.

Organizations providing transition assistance programs, career development workshops, networking events, and guidance on external resources like counseling and financial support see better retention.

Step 5: Support Beyond Day One

Membership programs, veteran employee resource groups, and onboarding support do more than help individuals—they boost team morale, help new employees understand workplace culture, and increase efficiency.

Practical Support Structures:

- Flexible work arrangements and family support programs strengthen commitment
- Tuition assistance for continuing education
- Employee resource groups where veterans can connect
- Leadership development programs specifically for veterans



The Financial Case

Let's talk money. Because that's what matters.

\$9,600

Per Veteran Hired

Maximize your Work Opportunity Tax Credit.

\$1B

Annual WOTC Claims

Employers nationwide claim over a billion dollars.

Tax Benefits

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) can reduce your federal income tax liability by as much as **\$9,600 per veteran hired**. There's no limit on the number of veterans you can hire to claim the credit.

Employers claim over \$1 billion annually in tax credits under WOTC.

State-level tax incentives, apprenticeships, and support programs help employers integrate veterans with lower upfront costs.

The Security Clearance Advantage

For federal contractors, this is huge.

By 2026, federal agencies face a projected 20% increase in mission-critical vacancies while security clearance backlogs stretch to 18 months.

Veterans with active clearances can hit the ground running with classified information, saving months of background checks and thousands in vetting expenses.

You're not just hiring faster. You're bidding on contracts you couldn't touch before.

Performance and Retention

59%

Better Performance

Employers report veterans perform better than non-veteran peers, with only 37.5% saying they perform about the same.

17%

Leadership Priority

Employers rank leadership as one of their top three factors for new hires—exactly what veterans bring.

80%

Retention Success

Companies with veteran retention rates around 80% save significantly on turnover costs compared to industry averages of 50-60%.



Common Mistakes (And How To Avoid Them)

1

Treating All Veterans The Same

Veterans with specialized training have vastly different civilian earnings than combat veterans in their first year—up to \$22,000 difference.

Match skills to roles. An intelligence analyst isn't the same as an infantry squad leader.

2

Expecting Them To Figure It Out

Federal data shows veterans leave government jobs at 6.7% annually versus 5% for non-veterans, with the gap widening to 18.7% versus 11.1% in the first five years.

Structured onboarding and support close this gap.

3

Ignoring Military Spouses

Military spouse unemployment is 21%—nearly five times the national average. JPMorgan Chase's Virtual Call Center in Maryland offers full-time, work-from-home roles with flexibility, competitive pay, and advancement opportunities specifically for military spouses.

Creating portable, skills-based career paths for military spouses who relocate frequently unlocks a highly skilled but underutilized workforce while strengthening retention and performance.

4

No Veteran Community

Veterans report slightly lower satisfaction with workplace relationships and meaningfulness of work compared to non-veterans.

Veterans at leading employers are encouraged to take leadership roles within diversity councils, fostering professional growth and representation.

Isolation kills retention. Connection drives it.

Real Examples That Work



JPMorgan Chase: Veteran Jobs Mission

In 2011, 11 companies committed to hire 100,000 veterans by 2020. That commitment grew into a coalition of more than 315 companies that have hired over one million veterans. By 2032, they aim to hire two million veterans and 200,000 military spouses.

The lesson: scale matters, but so does commitment.



Baylor Scott & White Health

Approximately 80% veteran retention rate through transition assistance programs, career development workshops, networking events, flexible work arrangements, tuition assistance, and family support programs.

The lesson: comprehensive support yields results.



Huntington Ingalls Industries (HII)

Recognized with the HIRE Vets Medallion Award for excellence in veteran hiring, retention and development. Offers diverse career paths from technical roles to management, with over 7,000 employees in 45 states and 16 countries.

Provides dedicated veteran recruiters, leadership development programs, and employee resource groups.

The lesson: make it systematic, not occasional.

Your Industry-Specific Playbook



Federal Contractors

Your Advantage: Veterans with active clearances, battle-tested skills, and mission-first mindsets ready to deploy immediately

Focus On: SkillBridge partnerships for pipeline development, WOTC tax credits, Veterans' preference in competitive hiring, Leveraging cleared talent to expand contract capabilities



Tech and Cybersecurity

Your Advantage: Veterans trained on advanced aircraft, cybersecurity networks, and precision systems

Focus On: COOL certifications in cybersecurity and IT, Active security clearances for government contracts, SkillBridge partnerships with major tech companies



Healthcare

Your Advantage: Military health professionals transition with advanced training, discipline, and patient care experience

Focus On: Transition assistance programs specifically for healthcare workers, Flexible scheduling to support veteran lifestyles, SkillBridge opportunities in health professions across the country through programs like VA careers



Manufacturing and Logistics

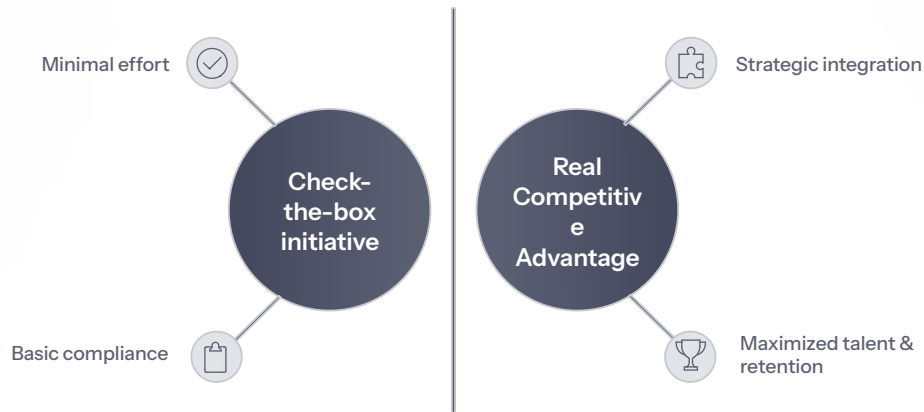
Your Advantage: Large shares of Army and Marine Corps veterans work in manufacturing and administrative support services

Focus On: Commercial Driver's License (CDL) opportunities through SkillBridge, Systems and logistics expertise from military operations, WOTC tax credits for high-volume hiring

The Bottom Line

You can hire veterans as a check-the-box diversity initiative. Or you can build a real competitive advantage.

The difference is structure.



Veterans maintain 3.0% unemployment versus 3.9% for non-veterans because employers value military experience and transferable skills.

59% of employers report veterans perform better than their non-veteran peers.

Companies with strong veteran programs achieve 80% retention rates.

But these results don't happen automatically. They happen when you:


1. **Understand military skills:** Use COOL and SkillBridge to identify real capabilities, not just job titles
2. **Create clear pathways:** Design portable, skills-based career paths with stability and advancement opportunities
3. **Structure support:** Provide transition assistance, mentorship, career development, and flexibility
4. **Measure and improve:** Track retention drivers like supervisor relationships, advancement opportunities, and work meaningfulness

This isn't charity. This is talent strategy.

Over 200,000 veterans transition annually, ready to bring their experience to new employers. The question isn't whether veteran hiring works—it's whether you'll build the systems to make it work for you.



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