

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT,
TRAINING, AND EMPLOYER OUTREACH (ACVETEO)

2015 Final Report

December 31, 2015

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS)
Washington, DC 20210

December 31, 2015

The Honorable Thomas E. Perez, Secretary
U.S Department of Labor
Frances Perkins Building
200 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20210

Secretary Perez,

It is my pleasure to provide you with the 2015 Report of the Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach (ACVETEO). The Committee's charter and obligation is to assess the employment and training needs of the nation's veterans, and advise yourself and the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) with regard to the extent to which the Department's programs and activities are meeting the employment and training needs of veterans. To that end, this report contains the Committee's recommendations, informed by the collective expertise of the ACVETEO membership, our partners within the Department's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS), and the many others from the public and private-sector who participated in the committee's activities throughout the past year.

Specifically, over the past year the committee has worked collaboratively – and in partnership with the DOL/VETS leadership – to explore new and innovative opportunities to further leverage the resources of the Department of Labor in ways that positively impact the employment situation of the veteran community. The ACVETEO membership believes that the recommendations and supporting rationales specified in the 2015 Report of the Advisory Committee serve to support continued innovation and enhanced impact across the Department, in service to the nation's veterans and their families.

In addition, I would like to take this opportunity to thank and commend the DOL/VETS team for their commitment and purposeful effort over the past year, positioned to enact the recommendations contained in the Committee's 2014 report. It is clear that the Department has made great strides in 2015, with regard to meaningful action to address the complex challenges associated with advancing the employment situation of the nation's veterans.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Committee and its membership please accept our gratitude for the opportunity to serve the nation's veterans through the ACVETEO. We look forward to your feedback and response to our recommendations.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J. Michael Haynie".

J. Michael Haynie, Ph.D.
Chair, Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach
Vice Chancellor, Syracuse University

PART I

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach (ACVETEO) is authorized at 38 U.S.C. 4110, and established in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). The ACVETEO is chartered to assess the employment and training needs of veterans, and their integration into the workforce; to determine the extent to which the programs and activities of the Department of Labor are meeting such needs; to assist the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans Employment and Training (ASVET) with outreach to employers, related to the advantages of hiring veterans; and to make recommendations with respect to training and employer outreach activities positioned to advance the employment situation of veterans.

Consistent with this charter and mission – and also consistent with the Committee’s organizing framework as represented in the *2014 Report of the Advisory Committee* – the recommendations provided by the 2015 ACTVETEO are organized around the following themes: 1) Veteran & Employer Outreach Activities; 2) Transition Assistance & Support (employment), and; 3) Employment & Training Activities/Needs Impacting Focused Populations. These themes served as the basis for the formation of ACVETEO sub-committees; each sub-committee was tasked with subject matter responsibility within the assigned area of focus. Ultimately however, recommendations were proposed and adopted based on the collaborative engagement of the full ACVETEO (appointed membership). A total of ten (**10**) recommendations (with supporting rationale) are specified in this report, and are organized in accordance with the ACVETEO’s theme and sub-committee structure.

A *condensed and selected* overview of those recommendations are as follows:

- **Veteran & Employer Outreach:**

- Strengthen and improve the coordination of federal outreach efforts to the employer community
- Support consistent messaging and outreach strategy within and across DOL activities
- Advance and facilitate intra-agency collaborations related to outreach activities and products
- Support the creation of an interagency task force (outreach) to ensure that all federal agencies are delivering a consistent message to transitioning service members, veterans and their families regarding the services and resources available to support employment

- **Transition Assistance & Support (employment):**

- Integrate and market transition and employment information in support of the MLC
- Ensure Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and other stakeholder participation in DOL’s Employment Workshop annual curriculum review
- Develop a strategy for clear and consistent messaging of credible online transition tools and resources to improve ease-of-access for transition resources

- **Focused Populations:**

- Act to expand the definition of homeless as a significant barrier to employment to include domestic violence and other life-threatening conditions (Section 103(b) of McKinney-Vento; 42 U.S.C. 11302(b))
- Organize and lead an interagency effort focused on collecting, aggregating, sharing, and leveraging robust data positioned to inform and subsequently advance the employment situation of veterans
- Provide specific training to field personnel, positioned to support enhanced understanding of the in- and post-service experience of women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans
- Initiate a research program to better understand if and how the current Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is positioned (or not) to address what may be differentiated needs, challenges, and post-service aspirations of women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans

PART II
SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

VETERAN & EMPLOYER OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

- 1) The Department should continue its efforts to strengthen and improve the coordination and integration of federal outreach efforts to the employer community. Specifically,
 - a) Act to create a consistent messaging and outreach strategy within and across DOL activities, as a means to ensure better coordination within the Department.
 - b) Continue to advance and facilitate intra-agency collaboration across DOL activities related to outreach activities and products.
 - c) Support the creation of an interagency task force (outreach) to ensure that all federal agencies are delivering a consistent message to transitioning service members, veterans and their families regarding the services and resources available to support employment.
- 2) Develop and enact a performance evaluation and assessment program, supporting continuous improvement of the employer outreach program.
 - a) Develop and align performance measures across DOL programs and establish a unified baseline measures for joint initiatives with the VA and DoD.
 - b) Purposefully enhance efforts to better connect veterans to employers, and in support of the State Workforce System.
 - c) Leverage a comprehensive performance evaluation and assessment program, as a means to provide clear performance effectiveness metrics and goals to LVERs.
- 3) Develop and enact a focused strategy to engage small and medium-sized employers (SMEs) related to veteran employment.
 - a) Initiate an effort to identify and highlight the best practices of SMEs at the national level, in support of veteran employment.
 - b) Develop and enact a strategic outreach plan focused on veteran employment, and directed at the SME community of employers; include a focus on incentives available to SMEs and other benefits related to hiring veterans.
 - c) Consider how the Secretary can support federal incentives, such as tax credits like the Veterans Work Opportunity Tax Credit, for SME's to hire veterans.
 - d) The Department should, in collaboration with Congress and partner agencies, act to establish the Veteran Hiring Tax Credit as a payroll tax credit.

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE & SUPPORT (EMPLOYMENT)

- 4) The Department of Labor should act in collaboration with its partner agencies and military services to develop a strategy to integrate and market transition and employment information in support of the MLC.
- 5) The Department should ensure that Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and other stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in DOL's Employment Workshop annual curriculum review, with a long-term goal of expanding the curriculum from the basics of getting a job to exploring the wide spectrum of potential training and employment opportunities for transitioning service members, veterans, and focused population groups.
- 6) The Department should, in collaboration with its partner agencies, develop a strategy for clear and consistent messaging of credible online transition tools and resources. A clear and consistent strategy is currently lacking, and would serve to improve ease-of-access for transition resources.

EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING ACTIVITIES IMPACTING FOCUSED POPULATIONS

- 7) The Department of Labor should take administrative action to expand the definition of homeless as a significant barrier to employment to include domestic violence and other life-threatening conditions, as defined in Section 103(b) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11302(b)).
(7a): The Department of Labor should explore avenues to pursue legislative action amending Title 38 to include paragraph (b) of Section 103 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act as it pertains to the definition of homeless veteran.
- 8) The Department of Labor should organize and lead an interagency effort, focused on collecting, aggregating, sharing, and leveraging robust data positioned to inform (and subsequently advance) the employment situation of veterans.
- 9) The Department of Labor should consider the means and mechanisms through which it could provide specific and purposeful training to field personnel, positioned to support enhanced understanding of the in- and post-service experience of women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans.
- 10) The Department of Labor should initiate a research program – in collaboration with VA and DoD – to better understand if/how the current Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is positioned to address what may be differentiated needs, challenges, and post-service aspirations of women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans.

PART III

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND RATIONALES

VETERAN & EMPLOYER OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

In the 2014 ACVETEO report, the number of public, non-profit and private-sector organizations providing employment resources and services to transitioning service members, veterans and their spouses was an issue addressed by the committee. Many of these organizations are actively engaged with employers and conducting public outreach campaigns with the purpose of promoting the hiring of veterans. However, there are many challenges related to cultivating an awareness of these programs among veterans, and also related to broadly encouraging employers to hire and retain veterans in the workforce.

The recommendations offered by the Committee in the 2015 report are intended to build from those suggested by the ACVETEO in 2014 – either expanding on the prior recommendations, or setting a new direction based on a newly identified challenge or opportunity. Specifically, these recommendations are offered as both a response to continued challenges, and also as a means to advance the employment situation of veterans.

Importantly, the Committee would like to acknowledge and applaud the actions the Department has taken over the past 12-months to address the ACVETEO’s concerns and suggestions (reflected in the 2014 Report of the Committee) regarding outreach efforts. Some of those efforts and actions include:

- The Department established “Regional Veterans Employment Coordinators” (RVECs) positions across the United States. These individuals will work with employers who have regional operations in multiple states, and also collaborate with state workforce agency staff to connect to the public workforce system. Individuals in these positions should not be duplicating or interfering with existing business services in state workforce agencies or local American Job Center activities.
- The Department has developed a Fact Sheet providing an overview of VETS programs and services, and also developed promotional material providing an outline of resources available to Employers/Veterans, and Service Members/Spouses and Caregivers.
- The Acting Assistant Secretary for VETS developed newsletters and created a blog to discuss activities by the Department, especially VETS.
- Veteran- and employer-focused outreach efforts are now detailed on the USDOL website.
- In 2015, the Department hosted an event for Veteran Service Organizations, non-profit agencies, and the general public to demonstrate how the various agencies within the U.S. Department of Labor interact, coordinate and collaborate to provide and improve services for veterans. Participating on the panel were leaders from across the Federal space.

Given the outreach efforts already underway (some cited above), and in the context of the continuing challenges identified by the committee related to advancing employment opportunity for the nation’s veterans, the Committee offers the following recommendations for potential action by the Department in the area of veteran and employer-focused outreach:

RECOMMENDATION 1:

The Department should continue its efforts and strengthen its strategy to improve on the coordination and integration of federal outreach efforts to the employer community, related to veterans' employment. Specifically,

- d) Act to create a consistent messaging and outreach strategy within and across DOL activities, as a means to ensure better coordination within the Department. Specifically, building from the theme of the Department's intra-agency panel described above, a fact sheet should be developed documenting what each agency within the Department provides in connection to services to veterans. This fact sheet should be provided to state workforce agencies, American Job Centers, VSOs, congressional staff, and other Federal agencies. It should be a resource on the Department's website, with links to obtain more information.
- e) Support the creation of an interagency task force (outreach) to ensure that all federal agencies are delivering a consistent message to transitioning service members, veterans and their families regarding the services and resources available to support employment. *No specific action has been taken on this 2014 ACVETEO recommendation.* It is recommended the Department take specific action by requesting other Federal agencies to join it in a task force to discuss and document each agency provides to transition service members, veterans, spouses and caregivers. Each agency should provide:
 - A recap of the programs and services currently offered;
 - The resources available from each agency;
 - The "message" each agency should provide to promote a consistent message among all agencies;
 - How best to share the resources and the message each agency provides; and
 - A summary of the Federal Hiring initiative within each agency.
- f) Purposefully collaborate with relevant state associations and other key stakeholders, to promote a unified and consistent message across/between state and local agencies positioned to advance veteran employment. It is the understanding of the ACTVETEO that *DOL/VETS team members are working to enact this recommendation, but that no specific action has been taken to date.*

Recommendation Rationale:

Federal services and programs related to service member transition and veterans' employment are spread among several departments, and across multiple entities, agencies and bureaus within those departments. For example, in the case of the DOL, management of activities and programs serving veterans includes not only the Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS), but also the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), and the Women's Bureau.

In the last several years, there have been a number of successful efforts to improve interagency coordination, reduce duplication of programs and streamline veterans' access to resources and services. Efforts such as the Administration's Joining Forces Initiative and recent improvements to the DoD's Transition Assistance Program (now called Transition GPS) are important initiatives encouraging unity of effort among the federal departments. More recently, the launch of the Veterans Employment Center

(VEC) is a significant step towards consolidating federal online employment portals and other tools into a one-stop-shop for service members, veterans and their families to search for employment and educational opportunities. The VEC also benefits employers by creating a central location to source military talent.

Despite this progress, significant effort must be made to continue to integrate public outreach efforts among the federal departments and within the Department of Labor, particularly with regards to employer engagement. There also needs to be consistency in public messaging—both within DOL, the state and local agencies that carry out its mission, and across all federal agencies who serve transitioning service members, veterans, their families, and employers.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Develop and enact a performance evaluation & assessment program, supporting continuous improvement of the employer outreach program. Specifically,

- d) Develop and align performance measures across DOL programs, and establish a unified baseline measures for joint initiatives with the VA and DoD.
 - For instance, DOL ETA, which is primarily responsible for the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), should ensure that JVSG performance measures for employers align with WIOA measures. DOL could convene a National Workgroup to include states and local representatives who have developed and implemented employer measures. The Department has formed a workgroup for this function; however, there has not been any report on what or how the JVSG programs is aligned with the WIOA performance measures. The ACVETEO should be provided with information regarding the alignment of performance measures and allowed to provide input to the workgroup.
 - Since the business outreach measure under WIOA – and JVSG – are new, there should be a period of testing and evaluation initiated before full implementation. Setting appropriate goals for the states and in turn local regions will require significant research and measurement.
- e) Purposefully enhance efforts to better connect veterans to employers, and in support of the State Workforce System. For example,
 - Focus on getting the maximum number of employers to list with the State Workforce System (SWA), and develop an indexing program through the National Labor Exchange (NLX) to get employers' job openings automatically listed in State Workforce Agencies job banks.
 - Develop a good "Job Development" program and process to ensure veterans registered with the SWA are promoted to employers.
 - Ensure a phase-in period is allowed for the states to comply with IT programmatic changes required, staff training, and adjustments.

The specific efforts listed above (b) were cited in the Committee's 2014 Report, but in the opinion of the Committee, remain an opportunity for action. A work plan should be developed by VETS staff to ensure each specific recommendation is addressed in 2016.

- f) Leverage a comprehensive performance evaluation and assessment program, as a means to provide clear performance effectiveness metrics and goals to LVERs. For example:
- Measure the number and quality of employer visits by LVERs and others conducting outreach efforts for veterans.
 - Set outcome goals with each LVER based on individual circumstances and resources including location, population and employer penetration rates.

The specific efforts listed above (c) were cited in the Committee's 2014 Report, but in the opinion of the Committee, remain an opportunity for action. A work plan should be developed by VETS staff to ensure each specific recommendation is addressed in 2016.

Recommendation Rationale:

As the resource inventory attached to this document attests, there is a vast array of programs currently available to service members, veterans and their families. Many of these programs and initiatives are funded by, managed from or with the participation of the Department of Labor. Today's challenging budget environment and limited resources require that the performance of these programs be measured and their value quantifiably demonstrated. While the value of many programs can be justified by a long history of positive anecdotal evidence, Congress and taxpayers are demanding better defined metrics to measure the effectiveness of veterans' employment programs.

The outcomes of key veterans' employment programs managed or supported by the Department of Labor, such as the VEC and the JVSG program, could be further improved by additional focus on identifying, developing and implementing a performance measurement system for veteran employment-related programs. A performance measurement system should promote the goals of the public workforce system, which are to facilitate a more effective and efficient labor exchange, and promote the employment and reemployment of veterans (for the JVSG program).

Similar to establishing a consistent message across federal agencies, DOL and the VA should work together to define unified baseline measures for joint efforts such as the VEC. While efforts are underway to promulgate performance metrics for DVOP and LVER programs, those efforts must include providing the proper training, planning and guidance to all program personnel. To help facilitate this, the DOL needs to provide a more readily available means to distribute training materials and information for tracking performance to all American Job Center personnel.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Develop and enact a focused strategy to engage small and medium-sized employers (SMEs) related to veteran employment.

- a) Initiate an effort to identify and highlight the best practices of SMEs at the national level, in support of veteran employment.
- b) Develop and enact a strategic outreach plan focused on veteran employment, and directed at the SME community of employers; include a focus on incentives available to SMEs and other benefits related to hiring veterans.
- c) Consider how the Secretary could support federal incentives, such as tax credits like the Veterans Work Opportunity Tax Credit, for SME's to hire veterans. Federal incentives should be:

- **Flexible:** Incentives should be available to all SMEs as appropriate. For instance, since many SME businesses do not have a current income tax liability, they should be allowed to elect to treat a tax credit as an offset against payroll taxes since many SMEs;
 - **Simple:** Incentives should be simple in administration for both the veteran and employer. For instance, the WOTC certification process could be simplified by requiring only proof of veteran status (DD 214) and proof of unemployment (latest unemployment paystub) followed by signing of perjury statement.
 - **Accountable:** There has been a limited effort to rigorously measure program impacts on veteran employment outcomes. For instance, a committee could be established to review the efficacy and effectiveness of incentives, such as tax credits, periodically in order to ensure they are achieving their intended goal of increasing veteran employment.
- d) The Department should, in collaboration with Congress and partner agencies, act to establish the Veteran Hiring Tax Credit as a payroll tax credit.

The specific efforts listed above (a-d) were cited in the Committee's 2014 Report, but in the opinion of the Committee, remain an opportunity for action. A work plan should be developed by VETS staff to ensure each specific recommendation is addressed in 2016. The ACVETEO recommends VETS develop a work plan with a step by step outline to ensure each recommendation is addressed.

The work plan should include the RVECs input and well as provide them with objectives to assist in obtaining positive results. Employer input in the process is vital to the process. Some additional questions or objectives in the work plan should include obtaining information from employers on:

- *What measures are being taken to assist with retention of employees who are veterans?*
- *What is the value of your veteran recruitment program?*
- *How do you use job or career fairs? What value do you put in job/career fairs? What are the skill sets for positions that you recruit during job/career fairs?*
- *What method works best to get employers input to promote hiring of veterans?*
- *What information would be helpful to you to assist in finding veterans to fill open positions?*

Recommendation Rationale:

American businesses are overwhelmingly small and medium sized employers (SME) businesses. In 2011, according to U.S. Census Bureau data, there were 5.68 million employer firms in the United States. SME's with fewer than 500 workers accounted for 99.7 percent of those businesses and those with less than 20 workers accounted for nearly 90 percent. Approximately 300,000 service-members transition out of the military each year. In recognition of the often complicated transition from the military into the civilian job market, Congress has consistently offered Veteran Hiring Tax Credits as an additional incentive for employers to extend opportunities to veterans. Unfortunately, employers report that the most recent iterations of these tax credits are burdensome, meaning many small employers will not take advantage of them. ACVETEO believes that Congress can craft Veteran Hiring Tax Credits in a way that makes it less burdensome to the potential employers and provides a quality incentive to extend career opportunities to job-seeking veterans.

The Committee has engaged in a robust dialogue with various constituencies and has received feedback from the SME business community, Veteran Service Organizations (VSO's) and veterans themselves. Special consideration was given to the importance of SME businesses to the U.S. economy and their

impact on job creation and hiring. With the recovery continuing, many SME's would like to add personnel, but many are hesitant because they are still recovering from the economic conditions of the past several years. Correspondingly, many well-trained and capable veterans are transitioning from military service but find themselves unemployed. The Committee believes that there is a strong rationale to highlight and support Federal efforts to incentivize hiring, such as through the WOTC. Tax incentives are one tool that can be very effective way to help SME's hire more veterans (See Appendix (III); *Role & Potential of SME Tax Incentives for Veteran Employment*).

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE & SUPPORT (EMPLOYMENT)

The transition from military to civilian life often presents significant challenges for service members. This is why the Department of Labor and its partners from the DoD, VA, and DOE have worked to build timely and relevant transitional resource programs for transitioning service members.

There has been tremendous progress with the TAP in recent years due to the VOW to Hire Heroes Act and the mandatory attendance of transitioning service members that ensures they have the opportunity to be exposed to these resources. The ACVETEO understands that service members do not always have the necessary time and resources to assist them in planning and aligning their military career goals with their civilian career goals prior to transition. That is why the ACVETEO recognizes and supports the ongoing implementation of the Military Life Cycle (MLC) model. With service members receiving information and resources throughout their military career, the MLC will facilitate a more effective and successful transition.

With this in mind, the ACVETEO has made the following recommendations to improve transitional resources for veterans before and after their transition from the military.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

DOL should, in collaboration with its partner agencies and military services, develop and enact a strategy to integrate and market transition and employment information in support of the MLC (which includes providing information pre-enlistment, during Initial Entry Training as well as follow-on and progressive Professional Military Education (PME) such as non-commissioned officer training and other training relevant to rank/grade and time in service.)

Recommendation Rationale:

The MLC model provides service members with the necessary time and resources to assist them in planning and aligning their military career goals with their civilian career goals. The MLC model embeds transition planning and preparation to meet Career Readiness Standards (CRS) throughout a service member's military career, beginning with their Individual Development Plan (IDP). To this end, transition and employment information should be marketed and offered to all service members, regardless of transition status.

Integrating transition and employment information into PME would support the MLC as PME is embedded in every service member's career whether it is a four-year enlistment or a 30-year career. This approach would also facilitate a significant culture change through which military leadership at all levels would better understand the transition process; have the ability to mentor transitioning subordinates; and direct transitioning subordinates to available resources.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

DOL should ensure VSOs and other stakeholder participation in DOL's Employment Workshop annual curriculum review with a long-term goal of expanding the curriculum from the basics of getting a job to exploring the wide spectrum of potential training and employment opportunities for transitioning service members, veterans, and focused population groups.

Recommendation Rationale:

To keep pace with the changing dynamics of the job seeker and employment space, VSOs and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) stakeholders provide critical services to transitioning service members in the community. Including VSOs and NGOs in the DOL Employment Workshop annual curriculum review will allow these organizations to address shortcomings in community engagement and make recommendations to address gaps or shortfalls in the employment workshop curriculum. The annual curriculum review should be formalized and disseminated to all stakeholders. Collaboration between VSOs/NGOs and DOL VETS in the annual employment workshop curriculum review will leverage expertise in the community, develop unity of effort, common messaging, and facilitate improved and consistent service.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

The Department should, in collaboration with its partner agencies, develop a strategy for clear and consistent messaging of credible online transition tools and resources.

Recommendation Rationale:

To transitioning service members, veterans and family members, credible online resources to not adhere to a consistent naming convention which can cause confusion. For example, a review of the following websites within DOL alone shows significant disparity of naming conventions:

- servicelocator.org
- dol.gov/vets/
- mynextmove.org/vets/
- onetonline.org/crosswalk/MOC/
- doleta.gov/oa/veterans.cfm

A simplified and consistent naming convention would help transitioning service members and veterans understand which resources are credible and relevant to their transition. This consistency and credibility will improve ease-of-access for transition resources.

EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING IMPACTING FOCUSED POPULATIONS

As both demonstrated in practice and informed by research, there is a clear danger with regard to failing to acknowledge inherent differences between the service-connected (and non-service-connected) experiences represented by different cohorts of the veterans' community; that is, specifically how those experiences might differently impact the process of transitioning from military to civilian life, and subsequent post-service employment. Put differently, it is the opinion of the committee that broad and sweeping generalizations with regard to the economic and employment concerns of the population – and strategies to impact those concerns – are inappropriate and limiting.

To that end, the committee makes the following recommendations related to advancing insight – and ultimately advancing impactful service-delivery – in support of the employment situation veterans with disabilities, women veterans, and Native American veterans:

RECOMMENDATION 7:

It has been identified by the Committee that inconsistencies related to defining the ‘eligible class’ of beneficiaries, within and between federal legislation aimed at addressing chronic homelessness, has created a situation where veterans who could otherwise benefit from the supportive services authorized by the legislation, and legally excluded (deemed an ‘ineligible class’). Accordingly, it is the recommendation of the ACVETEO that DOL should:

(a): Across all DOL programs – to include those administered by state workforce agencies, and incorporating programs such as HVRP – the Department should take administrative action to expand the definition of homeless as a significant barrier to employment to include domestic violence and other life-threatening conditions, as defined in Section 103(b) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11302(b)).

(b): DOL should explore avenues to pursue legislative action amending Title 38 to include paragraph (b) of Section 103 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act as it pertains to the definition of homeless veteran.

Recommendation Rationale:

In the Committee’s 2014 Report, it offered the following recommendation:

“The Department should initiate a review of its broad programmatic flexibility to serve veterans with disabilities, women veterans, and Native American veterans, via services and programs that reside outside of VETS (but within the Department). This review should take the form of a ‘gap analysis,’ considered in the context of the particular issues and challenges impacting the employment situation of veterans with disabilities, women veterans, and Native American veterans. Instances where the review suggests that programmatic flexibility would be useful – but does not exist – should be considered for administrative or legislative action.”

Based on the Department’s reviewing stemming from the above cited recommendation (2014), the VETS leadership identified definitional inconsistencies within/between Title 38 and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which impact program eligibility in the case of some homeless veterans. Addressing these inconsistencies will ensure both consistent treatment of homeless veterans under the law, and expanded opportunity for veterans to receive supportive services in a way that aligns with the legislative intent of Title 38 and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

The Department of Labor should take action to organize and lead an interagency effort, focused on collecting, aggregating, sharing, and leveraging robust data positioned to inform and subsequently advance the employment situation of veterans. This effort should include an initiative to conduct an inventory of existing data sources, the identification of relevant gaps in existing data, and a coordinated plan of action to address data gaps given new data collection, and/or modifications to existing data collection efforts.

Recommendation Rationale:

As the Committee cited in its 2014 Report, given extant approaches to data collection and limitations imposed by sample size, robust data currently available to represent the employment situation (and trends) characterizing veterans with disabilities, women veterans, and Native American veterans is *profoundly* inadequate to meaningfully inform policy and practice across DOL services and programs. Absent enhanced data and reporting, the ability of the Department (and other stakeholders) to adapt, customize, and continually improve vocational services and supports for these populations is strongly compromised.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

The Department of Labor should consider the means and mechanisms through which it could provide specific and purposeful training to field personnel, positioned to support enhanced understanding of the in- and post-service experience of women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans. The intent of such training is to better position field personnel – particularly those that interface with local and regional employers – to:

- a) Effectively communicate the business case supporting employment opportunities for women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans, and
- b) Educate the employer community in a way that blunts the myths and stereotypes often associated with these populations of the veterans’ community.

Recommendation Rationale:

It is the opinion of the ACTVETEO that one of the most significant barriers to effectively representing, serving, and advancing the employment aims of women veterans, veterans with disabilities, and Native American veterans is the fact that the majority of those working to that end (particularly in the field), are not culturally competent relevant to the in- and post-service experiences of these sub-cohorts of the veteran population. As a consequence, these individuals are not empowered with facts and data in a way that allows them to effectively communicate the business case supporting employment opportunities for women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans, and to educate the employer community in a way that blunts the myths and stereotypes often associated with these populations of the veterans’ community.

Importantly, we want to make clear that the Department has made great strides with regard to representing – in a culturally competent way – the employment concerns and opportunities characteristic of women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans. Accordingly, we do not cite the need for additional focus and training as a criticism, but as an opportunity – both for today, and as a future imperative.

As the nature of the in-service military experience changes (particularly for women), it is essential that those representing the post-service employment concerns of under-represented populations (within the military service population) are ‘armed’ with a true and culturally competent narrative relative to blunting the myths and stereotypes often associated with these populations of the veterans’ community.

RECOMMENDATION 10:

DOL should initiate a research program – in collaboration with VA and DoD – to better understand if and how the current TAP is positioned (or not) to address what may be differentiated needs, challenges, and post-service aspirations of women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans. Relevant research should questions include:

- a) In the context of the transition experience, are the barriers to employment facing women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans substantively differentiated from other populations of the veteran community?
- b) In the context of the transition experience, are the post-service employment aspirations of women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans substantively differentiated from other populations of the veteran community?
- c) If yes (either of the above), is the current TAP program appropriately positioned to mitigate those barriers/serve those aspirations?
- d) If no, what changes can be made to the current TAP program to appropriately address those barriers/serve those aspirations to employment facing women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans?

Recommendation Rationale:

Some early-stage academic research has suggested that some sub-cohorts of the transitioning service member population – such as women veterans, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans – may face challenges (and hold post-service vocational aspirations) that are not generalizable to the broader population of transitioning service members. Accordingly, the Committee has raised the question as to whether or not the current TAP program is best positioned to support the transition experience of these focused populations. Additional research is required to 1) understand specifically how and why the needs, challenges, and post-service aspirations of women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans may be differentiated from the broader population of transitioning service members, and 2) what (if any) changes might be made to the TAP experience to better position the program to support women veteran, veterans with disabilities, and native American veterans.

PART IV

APPENDIX

A. ADVISORY COMMITTEE CHARTER:

1. COMMITTEE'S OFFICIAL DESIGNATION:

Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach (ACVETEO)

2. AUTHORITY:

Section 4110 of Title 38, U.S. Code. The ACVETEO is a non-discretionary federal advisory committee and is subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), 5 U.S.C. App. 2.

3. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES:

The ACVETEO's responsibilities are to: assess employment and training needs of veterans and their integration into the workforce; determine the extent to which the programs and activities of the Department of Labor (DOL) are meeting such needs; assist the Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training (ASVET) in conducting outreach to employers with respect to the training and skills of veterans and the advantages afforded employers by hiring veterans; make recommendations to the Secretary of Labor, through the ASVET, with respect to outreach activities and the employment and training needs of veterans; and carry out such other activities deemed necessary to making required reports and recommendations.

4. DESCRIPTION OF DUTIES:

The ACVETEO is responsible for assessing the employment and training needs of the Nation's Veterans. Such needs may include transition assistance, protection of employment and reemployment rights, education, skills training, and integration into the workforce, among others, and assisting the ASVET in outreach activities to employers. The ACVETEO is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness with which existing DOL programs deliver required services to America's Veterans and, where deficiencies are detected, to recommend appropriate remedial action.

5. AGENCY TO WHOM THE COMMITTEE REPORTS:

U.S. Department of Labor

6. SUPPORT:

The Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) is responsible for providing necessary support for the ACVETEO.

7. ESTIMATED ANNUAL COSTS:

Annual Cost: \$120,000

Staff Years: 20 percent of a Full-Time Employee

8. DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICIAL:

A full-time permanent employee, appointed in accordance with DOL's procedures, will serve as the Designated Federal Official (DFO). The DFO will approve or call all of the ACVETEO's meetings, prepare and approve all meeting agendas, attend all ACVETEO meetings, adjourn any meeting when the DFO determines adjournment to be in the public interest, and chair meetings when directed to do so by the Secretary of Labor.

9. FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS:

The ACVETEO shall meet at least quarterly.

10. DURATION:

The ACVETEO has continuing responsibilities.

11. TERMINATION:

The ACVETEO shall continue until terminated by law. This charter will expire at exactly two (2) years from the date it is filed with Congress.

12. MEMBERSHIP AND DESIGNATION:

The ACVETEO shall consist of at least 12, but no more than 16, representative members appointed by the Secretary of Labor, consisting of: (1) seven individuals, one each from among the representatives nominated by each of (a) the Society for Human Resource Management, (b) the Business Roundtable, (c) National Association of State Workforce Agencies, (d) the United States Chamber of Commerce, (e) the National Federation of Independent Business, (f) a nationally recognized labor union or organization and (g) the National Governors Association; (2) no more than five representatives nominated by veterans' service organizations that have a national employment program; and (3) no more than five individuals who are recognized authorities in the fields of business, employment, training, rehabilitation, or labor and who are not employees of DOL.

The following, or their representatives, shall be ex-officio, nonvoting members of the ACVETEO: the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; the Secretary of Defense; the Director of the Office of Personnel Management; the ASVET; the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Employment and Training; and the Administrator of the Small Business Administration.

The Secretary of Labor shall appoint a member of the ACVETEO as the Chairperson and the Chairperson shall serve in that position for no more than two (2) consecutive years.

Members of the ACVETEO shall serve without compensation. A vacancy in the ACVETEO shall be filled in the manner in which the original appointment was made.

Members may be appointed by the Secretary of Labor at any time, but appointees shall serve for a term not greater than three (3) years and their terms shall expire on January 31. The Secretary of Labor may reappoint members for an unlimited number of terms.

Except as otherwise required by law, ACVETEO membership will be consistent with the applicable FACA regulations, as follows: (a) Membership on the ACVETEO will be fairly balanced; (b) Members will come from a cross-section of those directly affected, interested, and qualified as appropriate to the nature and functions of the ACVETEO; (c) the composition of the ACVETEO will therefore depend upon several factors, including: (i) the ACVETEO's mission; (ii) the geographic, ethnic, social, economic, or scientific impact of the ACVETEO's recommendations; (iii) the types of specific perspectives required; (iv) the need to obtain divergent points of view on the issues before the ACVETEO, such as, for example, those of consumers, technical experts, the public at-large, academia, business, or other sectors; and (v) the relevance of State, local or tribal governments to the development of the ACVETEO's recommendations.

To the extent permitted by the FACA and other laws, committee membership should also be consistent with achieving the greatest impact, scope and credibility among diverse stakeholders. The diversity in such membership includes, but is not limited to, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity.

13. SUBCOMMITTEES:

The DFO has the authority to create subcommittees. Any subcommittees that are created report to the ACVETEO and may not provide advice or work products directly to the DOL.

14. RECORD KEEPING:

The records of the ACVETEO, whether they are records of formally or informally established subcommittees, or other subgroups of the ACVETEO, shall be handled in accordance with General Records Schedule 26, Item 2, or other approved DOL records disposition schedule. These records shall be available for public inspection and copying and are subject to the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

15. REPORTS REQUIREMENT:

The ACVETEO is required to submit an annual report by December 31 to the Secretary of Labor and to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives on the employment and training needs of veterans, with special emphasis on disabled veterans, that must contain the following: an assessment of the employment and training needs of veterans and their integration into the workforce; an assessment of the outreach activities carried out by the Secretary of Labor to employers with respect to the training and skills of veterans and the advantages afforded employers by hiring veterans; an evaluation of the extent to which the programs and activities of DOL are meeting veterans' employment and training needs; a description of the activities of the ACVETEO during the past fiscal year; a description of activities that the ACVETEO proposes to undertake in the succeeding fiscal year; and any recommendations for legislation, administrative action, and other action that the ACVETEO considers appropriate.

Within sixty (60) days after receiving each annual report, the Secretary shall transmit a copy to the Congress with any comments concerning the report that the Secretary considers appropriate.

16. FILING DATE:

This charter is effective upon the signature and date indicated below.

SETH D. HARRIS
Acting Secretary of Labor

Date

B. ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP:

Appointed Members (alpha order):

Linda J. Bilmes

Daniel Patrick Moynihan Sr. Lecturer in Public Policy
Harvard University, JFK School of Government

Mary R. Blasinsky

Sr. Vice-President & Chief of Staff
National Federation of Independent Business

M. Eric Eversole (Committee Vice-Chair)

Vice President and Exec. Dir., Hiring Our Heroes Program
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Ryan M. Gallucci

Deputy Director, National Veterans Service
Veterans of Foreign Wars

Dawn F. Halfaker

President, Board of Directors
Wounded Warrior Project

J. Michael Haynie, PhD (Committee Chair)

Vice Chancellor, Syracuse University
Barnes Professor of Entrepreneurship
Whitman School of Management, Syracuse University

Henry G. Jackson

President and CEO
Society for Human Resource Management Rep.

Richard M. Jones

Member, American Legion
Sr. Vice-President, CBS Corporation

Dane Linn

Vice President, The Business Roundtable

David Quam

Deputy Director, Policy; Office of Federal Relations
National Governors Association

Darrell L. Roberts

Executive Director
Helmets to Hardhats

Bob Simoneau

Deputy Executive Director
National Association of State Workforce Agencies

Ex-officio, Nonvoting Members

- Secretary of Veterans Affairs
- Secretary of Defense
- Director, Office of Personnel Management
- Asst. Secretary of Labor (VETS)
- Asst. Secretary of Labor (ETA)
- Administrator, U.S. Small Business Administration

C. REVIEW OF FY 2014 ACVETEO ANNUAL REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS & PROGRESS UPDATE

IN 2014, the 2014 Report of the Advisory Committee provided recommendations around the follow themes:

- **Veteran and Employer Outreach Activities**
- **Transition Assistance and Support (Employment)**
- **Employment and Training Activities/Needs Impacting Focused Populations**

Within these 3 themes, 12 recommendations were forwarded to DOL. The Committee is happy to report that DOL, led by VETS has made significant progress on addressing the 2014 recommendations while continuing to support the Committees work in developing 2015 recommendations. A summary of the progress to date is outlined below.

VETERAN AND EMPLOYER OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

There are a number of public, nonprofit and private-sector organizations providing employment resources and services to transitioning service members, veterans and their spouses. Despite the number of resources now available, there continue to be challenges related to cultivating an awareness of these programs among veterans, and to broadly encouraging employers to hire and retain veterans in the workforce. The recommendations below are provided as both a response to these continued challenges and as an effort to advance the employment situation of veterans.

Recommendation 1: The Department should develop and enact a strategy to improve on the coordination and integration of federal outreach efforts to the employer community, related to veterans' employment. Specifically,

- a. Create a consistent messaging and outreach strategy within and across DOL activities, as a means to ensure better coordination within the Department; including ETA, OFCCP, ODEP, and Women's Bureau.
- b. Support the creation of an interagency task force to ensure that all federal agencies are delivering a consistent message to transitioning service members, veterans and their families regarding the services and resources available to support employment.
- c. Purposefully collaborate with relevant state associations and other key stakeholders, to promote a unified and consistent message across/between state and local agencies positioned to advance veteran employment.

Response: DOL VETS' Office of Strategic Outreach completed its' first Strategic Outreach Plan, taking into account the Committee's Recommendations to nestle all the available services DOL can provide in this area under a coordinated DOL VETS led message.

DOL VETS has partnered with the Employment and Training Agency (ETA) to lead a DOL in-house All Things Veteran (ATVET) monthly meeting to develop outreach strategies and materials to communicate a consistent message pertaining to DOL's programs and services for employers and veterans. The meeting is an open forum for all DOL organizations to raise and discuss on-going programs that are related to, or

affect veterans. We have developed fact sheets of DOL programs that offer services/support to veterans, Transitioning Service Members, and families. We now provide regular newsletters, blogs, and website content pertaining to veterans' employment

VETS engaged with existing working groups for veterans and transitioning service members, and specifically reached out to new audiences to address messaging and communications, receive inputs and recommendations, and report those findings back to the Committee. VETS is a supporting partner in helping develop, grow and formalize federal sector veteran initiatives with the Departments of Energy (Utility Workforce Industry Initiative), Transportation, Agriculture and Homeland Security. Work has begun on identifying redundancies and gaps in federal & private employment outreach and sharing that information amongst the groups. Specific efforts have involved engaging private sector trade associations who deal with the aforementioned partners, as a path to assist the member companies of those associations in their veteran hiring efforts.

VETS believes that contingent upon findings from these efforts, the potential to establish a long-term working group designed to coordinate employers and veterans outreach efforts in Federal/State departments is possible as a future action.

Recommendation 2: The Department should develop and enact a performance evaluation & assessment program, supporting continuous improvement of the employer outreach program. Specifically act to,

- a) Develop and align performance measures across DOL programs, and establish a unified baseline measures for joint initiatives with the VA and DoD.
- b) Purposefully enhance efforts to better connect veterans to employers, and in support of the State Workforce System.
- c) Leverage a comprehensive performance evaluation & assessment program, as a means to provide clear performance effectiveness metrics and goals to LVERs.

Response: VETS will work to ensure that the WIOA planning and implementation process includes development of performance measures for employment outreach. Staff members have been designated to assist in the overall WIOA performance metrics effort to help develop performance metrics for LVERs that can be associated with those for business services teams. Work has also begun with partner agencies to ensure business services are also incorporating and tracking LVER's performance metrics. VETS has proposed the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) provide a briefing to the Committee on open studies focused on measuring performance in this area.

VETS has identified representatives who are working with State Workforce Agencies and State representatives to develop baseline metrics, and identify and promote best practices. The Department is developing a comprehensive WIOA Strategic Communications Plan, specifying changes directly affecting programs related to veterans, and provides outreach to stakeholders.

VETS specifically has implemented a Regional Veterans' Employment Coordinator structure and is continually enhancing efforts to connect veterans to employers, through highlight of the State Workforce

System, and how the system directly can affect veterans from the National to Local level, via our direct engagement and through job fair/summit partnership presentations.

Recommendation 3: The Department should develop and enact a focused strategy to engage small and medium-sized employers (SMEs) related to veteran employment. Specifically,

- 1) Develop and enact a strategic outreach plan focused on veteran employment directed at the SME community of employers; include a focus on incentives available to SMEs and other benefits related to hiring veterans.
- 2) Initiate an effort to identify – and publically highlight – the best practices of SMEs at the national level, in support of veteran employment.
- 3) Strategically consider how best to support and leverage federal incentives, such as tax credits like the Veterans Work Opportunity Tax Credit, for SME’s to hire veterans.
- 4) The Department should, in collaboration with Congress and partner agencies, act to establish the Veteran Hiring Tax Credit as a payroll tax credit (See Appendix [III]; Role & Potential of SME Tax Incentives for Veteran Employment).

Response: DOL VETS has implemented a focused strategy to begin highlighting and promoting best practices for hiring veterans among SMEs via online, newsletter, and blog content. We have engaged and informed the SME community of employers through: 1) VETS’ Strategic Outreach Plan, 2) VETS’ Regional Outreach Specialists, 3) DOL’s Office of Public Engagement, 4) DOL’s Office of Public Affairs, and 5) DOL Secretary’s Representatives. We have engaged, via Regional Outreach Specialists (Regional Veterans’ Employment Coordinators) with SMEs to increase veterans hiring efforts by directly engaging with employers to highlight the benefits to them of utilizing the national workforce system and American Job Centers. We initiated a coordinated effort to help employers in cross-regional efforts by tracking our engagements with customer relationship management products. We have begun to publically highlight those efforts by increasing communications staff in the employment outreach effort which has allowed VETS to increase outreach efforts via social media, electronic newsletters, Youtube videos and improved websites, initially www.dol.gov/vets and now the newly launched www.Veterans.gov.

DOL VETS has engaged with the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs (OCIA) to ensure the committees’ interest in advocating the re-authorization of the WOTC for veterans is known, and to ensure we are providing current information on VETS overall employment efforts and successes and challenges at local levels.

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT (EMPLOYMENT)

Recommendation 4: The Department should, in collaboration with its partner agencies, develop and enact a strategy to improve outreach on the public availability of Transition Assistance Program (TAP) resources.

- a. Include a focus on adapting the public-facing online curriculum to serve as a reference throughout and after transition.

- b. Include a focus on capturing data positioned to inform the effectiveness and accessibility of the public-facing online curriculum, as a post-service employment reference and resources (i.e. uses and user-ship).

Response: Currently, VETS' Employment Workshop and Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) have public facing materials located on several websites to include Joint Knowledge Online (JKO), DoD Transition Assistance Program, eBenefits, and DOL VETS.

VETS has evaluated and improved the curriculum to improve the effectiveness and accessibility of on-line content and materials as well as to improve outreach on the public availability of TAP resources for veterans well after they leave active service. We have increased outreach and marketing of on-line curriculum to local and state resources, Veteran Services Organizations, and Student Veteran Organizations while ensuring that this material is easily accessed on our DOL VETS website and other stakeholder sites to include Joint Knowledge Online (JKO), DoD Transition Assistance Program, and eBenefits .

The Department of Labor Employment Workshop curriculum was reviewed to place an emphasis and include more information on accessing the on-line curriculum. VETS worked with DoD to develop a voluntary survey of participants who access JKO, to include curricula review and demographic information (classroom or virtual, branch of service, component, time in service, grade, service member or spouse) to assist with defining the requirements for changes and improvements to the curriculum and public access.

VETS continues to focus of the accessibility and effectiveness of on line TAP as a reference after active service.

Recommendation 5: The Department should, in collaboration with Congress and partner agencies, act to extend the Off-Base Transition Training (OBTT) pilot program, until a full analysis on the effectiveness of the pilot program can be completed, and subsequently inform a future course of action.

Response: As part of the OBTT pilot program there were 21 employment workshops conducted with a total of 250 participants. GAO published their report to Congress July 2015 which recommended that DOL assess and report to Congress the extent to which further delivery of the employment workshop to veterans and their spouses could fill a niche not fully served by existing federal programs. DOL concurred with the recommendation and committed to conduct a deliberate assessment of the need for these services; which services are most useful to veterans and their spouses; and what overlap exists with programs providing similar services to this population.

Recommendation 6: The Department should, in collaboration with partner agencies, conduct an audit of the current TAP curriculum (and associated post-service employment outcomes realized by veterans with disabilities, women veterans, and Native American veterans), to ascertain whether there is a need for specialized training to address the specific/particular needs of these populations as they enter the workforce.

Response: DOL has continued to monitor the instructor performance through a review of Transition GPS participant survey results. The Department has awarded a contract to independently evaluate the impact of attendance at the Employment Workshop. The evaluation will analyze the impacts of the TAP DOLEW

program on employment-related outcomes for separating service members. This evaluation is still in process and once completed, the results will be briefed to the Committee.

In FY14, as a member of the TAP Senior Steering Group Curriculum Working Group, DOL began an annual curriculum evaluation. This included analysis of results from the web-based Transition GPS participant survey instrument developed by DoD, and input from various stakeholders. Based on this evaluation, DOL revised the Employment Workshop curriculum to include Equal Employment Opportunity and Americans with Disability Act content, the Veteran Employment Center content, and enhanced information on WIOA training, dislocated worker training, and registered apprenticeship programs.

The FY15 curriculum review began in April 2015, in conjunction with the TAP Senior Steering Group Curriculum Working Group's planned review of the entire Transition GPS curriculum. DOLEW curriculum review during the summer of 2015 recommended making changes to tighten the focus of the three-day workshop to four core areas:

1. Developing and executing a job search plan;
2. Planning for success in a civilian work environment;
3. Creating résumés, cover letters, and other self-marketing materials; and
4. Engaging in successful interviews and networking conversations.

To better meet the Committee's desire to provide comprehensive services to special populations, a review was conducted of the curriculum for special populations to include women veterans, veterans with disabilities, and Native American veterans residing on tribal lands.

This revised curriculum was piloted in October with planned follow on implementation in January 2016.

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES/NEEDS IMPACTING FOCUSED POPULATIONS

Recommendation 7: The Department should initiate an audit and critical review of all outreach and messaging programs and practices – and take corrective action where required – to ensure such programs and practices include (and appropriately represent) veterans with disabilities, women veterans, and Native American veterans. Corrective action (where and if required) should include an emphasis on vocational success stories/images of success for veterans with disabilities, women veterans, and Native American veterans, across all DOL services and programs.

Response: The DOL VETS Office of Strategic Outreach staff are working with the DOL Office of Public Affairs (OPA) to ensure appropriate representation of focused populations in all future outreach and messaging. In addition, DOL VETS is collaborating with the various agencies within DOL to ensure messaging is consistent across DOL and all focused populations are accurately portrayed in our marketing materials. In 2015, DOL VETS has significantly enhanced its social media and web presence as demonstrated with their redesigned website at www.dol.gov/vets.

Recommendation 8: The Department should initiate, leveraging both internal and external (private-sector) resources and partners, a comprehensive research program focused on identifying the particular, employment-related challenges in transition, for veterans with disabilities, women veterans, and Native

American veterans. This effort should include a purposeful and specific plan of action indicating how research findings will be leveraged to inform changes (if required) in policy and practice across DOL services and programs, so as to better support the post-service employment situation of the focused veteran populations.

Response: The DOL VETS Women Veteran Program continuously monitors data and research efforts for relevance, accuracy, and practical application to messaging and/or program objectives. Ongoing efforts include continuous review of new research articles pertaining to women veterans and employment through the DOL library and in-depth analysis of BLS unpublished unemployment data to observe trends pertaining to women veteran unemployment compared to male veterans and non-veterans of either gender. The Women Veteran Program Manager serves as a subject matter expert on women veterans research for CEO and other organizations, and has served as a Discussant at the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management annual conference, reviewing the work of three researchers and presenting applicability to veterans' employment, research limitations and/or risks in generalizations or methodology, and opportunities for future research.

The most consistent finding of the broad based analysis was a lack of awareness of employment services and confusion over qualification criteria among women veterans. To reduce confusion, the DOL VETS Women Veteran Program has posted the *Employment Assistance for Women Veterans Webinar* on the web at <http://www.dol.gov/vets/womenveterans/>. The webinar is available in both u-tube video and a downloadable slide presentation with active links, to meet the needs of both women veterans and service providers.

Other findings, such as unemployment rates of women veterans compared to male veterans or women non-veterans and the effectiveness of JVSG services for women veterans have been made available to the general public in the *Women Veterans (Fact Sheet)*, which is downloadable in PDF format on the web at <http://www.dol.gov/vets/womenveterans/>. Common research challenges and recommendations for future research are also downloadable in PDF format in *Women Veteran Research Gaps* for stakeholders with research interests and/or capabilities to improve the relevance and significance of future research pertaining to women veterans and employment.

Recommendation 9: The Department should initiate a review of its broad programmatic flexibility to serve veterans with disabilities, women veterans, and Native American veterans, via services and programs that reside outside of VETS (but within the Department). This review should take the form of a 'gap analysis,' considered in the context of the particular issues and challenges impacting the employment situation of veterans with disabilities, women veterans, and Native American veterans. Instances where the review suggests that programmatic flexibility would be useful – but does not exist – should be considered for administrative or legislative action.

Response: During the review of broad programmatic flexibility to serve focused populations of veterans, the DOL VETS Women Veteran Program identified a discrepancy in the definition of homelessness in 38 U.S.C. versus 42 U.S.C.. 38 U.S.C. § 2002 defines "homeless veteran" as "a veteran who is homeless (as that term is defined in section 103(a) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance act (42 U.S.C.

11302(a)).” This definition excludes a change that was made in the 2009 reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance act that disproportionately impacts women. On May 20, 2009, President Obama signed the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009, which amended and reauthorized the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance act with substantial changes to the definition of homelessness, including:

“Domestic violence and other dangerous or life-threatening conditions... consider to be homeless any individual or family who is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions in the individual’s or family’s current housing situation, including where the health and safety of children are jeopardized, and who have no other residence and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.” (42 U.S.C. § 11302(b))

Victims of domestic violence who lack their own source of income (i.e. employment) literally must choose between the dangers and risks of homelessness and the dangers and risks of domestic violence. As employment is a critical component of effectively escaping, and not returning to, domestic violence, VETS has made a policy change to correct this exclusion for VETS employment services. The definition of homeless as a SBE was updated to include paragraph (b) of Section 103 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, effective October 30, 2015. The Veteran Program Letter mandating this change for the purpose of receiving DVOP services is available online at <http://www.dol.gov/vets/VMS/VPLs/VPL-03-14-Change-2.pdf>. The new definition of homeless will be phased in to the HVRP grant cycle and all HVRP grantees will be required to apply the new definition in 2018.

Recommendation 10: The Department should direct the BLS to work with the ACVETEO – as well as representatives from the Census Bureau and the Department of Veterans Affairs – to craft recommendations related to enhancements to the nature and frequency of veteran-employment data collection, informative of the employment situation of veterans with disabilities, women veterans, and Native American veterans.

Response: The DOL VETS Women Veteran Program has found the release of annual averages of the BLS veteran-employment data collection to be very informative of the employment situation of women veterans. The program began with a quantitative review of 17 years (19 years at the time of this report) of unemployment rates, which revealed that the highest unemployment rates (annual averages), without exception, were found among women veterans and male non-veterans, which are also the two populations most likely to be in the labor force. These findings led to an annual more in-depth examination of the annual averages, comparing women veterans to male veterans, male non-veterans, and women non-veterans by population percentage, age, era of service, enrollment in school, race and ethnicity, educational attainment, occupation, industry and class of worker, reasons for working less than full time, and duration of unemployment in the 2013 and 2014 Current Population Survey Annual Averages. The examination of the annual average unpublished tables provided by BLS has revealed trends pertaining to women veteran unemployment compared to male veterans and non-veterans of either gender and has been a critical component in the development of the current status of the DOL VETS Women Veteran Program. This examination will be repeated on the 2015 Current Population Survey Annual Averages in early 2016.

Recommendation 11: The Department should develop an intentional and specific communication campaign focused on educating employers related to women in the military, with a particular focus toward mitigating stigma and undermining stereotypes associated with the nature of military service for women.

Response: It is one of the goals of the DOL VETS Women Veteran Program to increase accuracy and relevancy of the national narrative on women veterans and employment in order to mitigate stigmas and undermine stereotypes. Progress is being made and VETS has worked with OPA to remove victimizing messaging from the women veteran dialog and has led a cultural shift in how DOL portrays and includes women veterans in messaging. Efforts have included DOL tweets and sharables during Women’s History Month and Women’s Equality Day as well as blogs/newsletters/articles published through OPA, Stars and stripes, and the Huffington Post throughout the year to increase awareness of services while increasing awareness of the strengths of women veterans.

DOL VETS has provided relevant, accurate, and current information reflecting the employment situation of women veterans for 4 congressional testimonies and has served as the primary SME on the employment situation of women veterans for public, private, and non-profit stakeholders. One example of VETS influence on public stakeholders is the OPM Women Veterans Initiative Workgroup. The VETS Women Veteran Program provided information and data on women veterans and employment and vetted information and data provided by other agency workgroup partners, which resulted in a published report that is now available online and is often quoted in the women veteran space.

Another example of VETS influence on public stakeholders at the state level is the feedback from an employment services manager in TX after hearing the Women Veteran Program Manager speak about the “Great Divide” for women veterans and how public perceptions can exclude women veterans from the services and respect they’ve earned. As he put it, “This was eye-opening. While I do not believe I have personally excluded women veterans intentionally or unintentionally, I can now see that I have stood by while others did so. That will never happen again.” Speeches have also included the National Association of Women Veteran Coordinators and the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers National Conferences, which amplify the effects of messaging as these service providers take the messaging further out into local communities.

One example of this influence on private stakeholders is the turn-around of a private sector draft blog highlighting damaging and inaccurate myths about women veterans. After the author was educated on the current situation, the blog transformed into an accurate piece titled “Women Who Served in the Military in High Demand for Job Openings,” with information quoted from the VETS Women Veteran page.

Recommendation 12: The Department should develop a strategy to build upon the local community partnerships and outreach established for other programs, such as HVRP (and in partnership with the VA’s SSVF program) to establish support networks for women veterans related to workforce training, skills development, and employment.

Response: The DOL VETS Women Veteran Program encourages local communities to take action on behalf of women veterans, and encourages women veterans to be active in their local communities in support of themselves and their sisters in service. In all speeches and presentations to women veterans, VETS has stressed the importance of proclaiming veteran status whenever and however possible. These efforts have inspired some women veterans to wear T-shirts showing their veteran status during travel and at events, including the Women Veteran Representative for the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers, who now gives the same advice in her presentations. These same women also report feeling empowered to lead by example and effect cultural change on behalf of women veterans.

Engagement efforts with stakeholders are also making progress in this area. Through partnership with VA's Center for Women Veterans (CWV), local VETS staff and handouts were available at 5 Regional VA Veteran Resources Campaigns, 1 VA Veteran Resources Exhibit, and 1 VA Town Hall to ensure women veterans gathering at these events had access to employment services and resources. Information about the employment needs of women veterans and the free employment services available to meet those needs is also provided to public, private, and non-profit organizations that serve women, including the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN), the SVAC Minority on Women Program, Women Who Served, Five Star Women, DAV, and graduate students conducting research or needing to verify accuracy regarding the employment situation of women veterans.

Interagency partners at the national level now regularly take the DOL VETS messaging and updates pertaining to women veterans to their local service providers. Two examples of these partnerships are VETS serving on the White House Council on Women and Girls Women Veteran Working Group and Federal Partners: Women and Trauma, providing briefings and handouts on VETS services and findings pertaining to women veterans and employment. The VETS Women Veteran Program Manager has also served as a SME for the VA Office of Policy and Planning Veteran Reintegration and the VHA Office of Rural Health, ensuring the needs of women veterans and employment needs of all veterans are considered.