



Joining Forces For Women Veterans

Summit Toolkit

Section II: Issue Briefs

This second section of the Joining Forces for Women Veterans Toolkit provides a summary and discussion guide of the following issues:

- A. Homelessness (pp. 2-5)
- B. Reintegration (pp. 6-8)
- C. Employment and Careers (pp. 9-15)
- D. Mentoring (pp. 16-20)

In preparation for your Summit discussions, all invitees should review the issue briefs contained here for an introduction to the issues, overview of key constraints and examples of promising practices to address those obstacles. The briefs conclude with a few probing questions to help you initiate discussion and explore possible support strategies within your own work environment and community/region. We encourage you to adapt your discussions and format to address the relevant issues women veterans face in your company and/or community.

Contact Us:

For more information about planning or sponsoring a *Joining Forces for Women Veterans* Summit, or other BPW Foundation programs, please contact us at:

BPW Foundation
1718 M Street, NW, #148
Washington, DC 20036
tel: 202.293.1100; fax: 202.861.0298
foundation@bpwfoundation.org

www.bpwfoundation.org

www.womenjoiningforces.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BPWF4WomenVets

Twitter: @BPWF4WomenVets

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Joining Forces for Women Veterans Homelessness Issue Brief (page 1 of 4)

The United States devotes significant resources to training our soldiers and equipping them to be skilled, efficient, disciplined, and adaptable employees. Yet, when soldiers exit the service, they often have no job prospects or housing opportunities. Sadly, there are more than 120,000 homeless veterans on our streets, an estimated 13,000 of which are women, many with children. Homeless veterans include those who sleep on park benches or in temporary shelters, as well as those who hold steady jobs but live out of their cars or find temporary residence on a friend or relative's couch. Access to affordable permanent housing remains veterans' **number one unmet need**, according to a 2008 report from the [Department of Veterans Affairs Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups](#).

In the past decade, an estimated [100,000 mothers](#) have been deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. As these women return home, they will be confronted with the very real challenge of securing and maintaining suitable housing for their families. While the overall number of homeless veterans is declining, the number of homeless women veterans is increasing. And, women veterans are four times more likely than non-veteran women to experience homelessness.

There are a number of underlying causes and circumstances for women veterans' disproportionate levels of homelessness. A recent study identified the following risk factors associated with homelessness among women veterans: being unmarried, unemployed, disabled, or having a history of sexual trauma. Homeless women veterans often have more severe mental health issues than male veterans, in part because they are more likely to experience military sexual assault (MST) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They are also less likely to seek medical assistance as they try to work through their problems, or deny their needs for help outright, sticking to their military persona of resiliency in the face of difficulty.

2.3-3.5 million The number of people in the United States who experience homelessness each year

13,000 The number of women veterans currently homeless

40 The percentage of women on active duty who have children under the age of 18

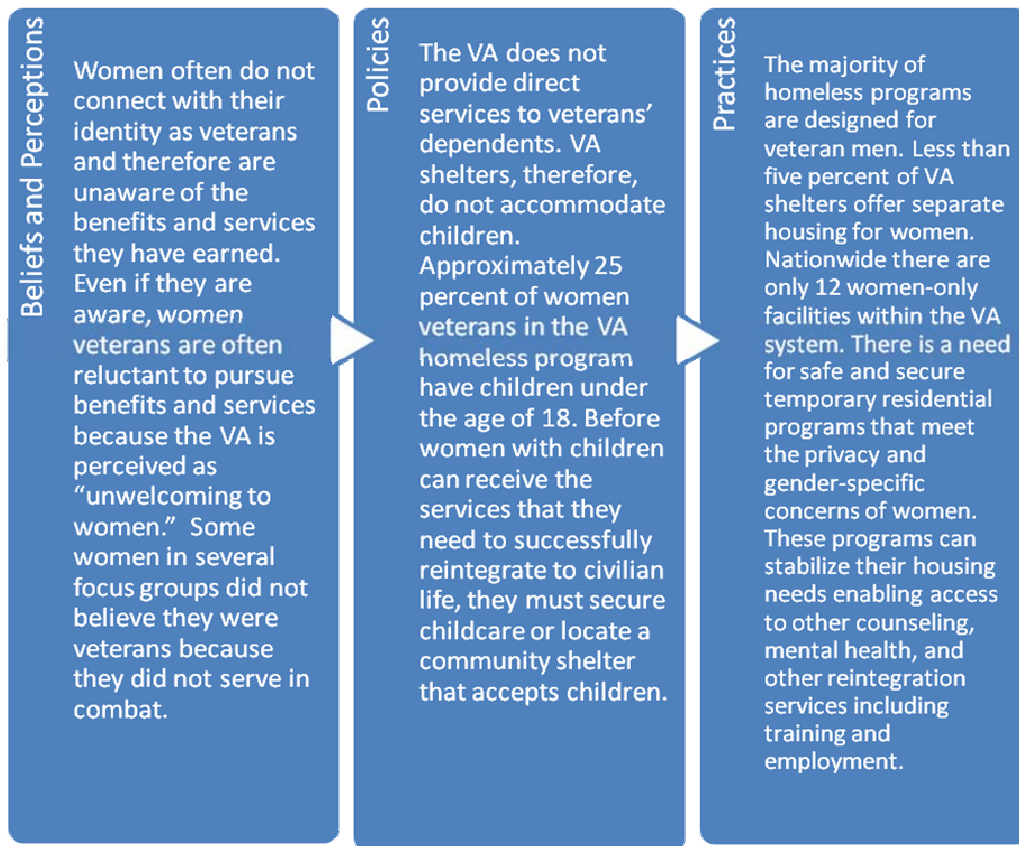
26 The percentage of homeless adults who are veterans

4 The multiple by which women veterans are likely to become homeless versus non-veteran women

Joining Forces for Women Veterans Homelessness Issue Brief (page 2 of 4)

As of June 2008, over 19,000 women veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan were diagnosed with mental disorders by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), all at risk of becoming homeless. In 2009, there were more than 200,000 women on active duty in military. Recognizing approximately 40% of women in the military experience MST, that will translate to another 80,000 women veterans at-risk for homelessness.

Addressing housing challenges for women veterans requires our nation not only support the 13,000 who are currently homeless but also **prevent future** women veterans from becoming homeless. While access to VA benefits is associated with better housing outcomes for women veterans, they are often reluctant to utilize the benefits and services they have earned. Solving the rising rate of homeless women veterans requires a more in-depth understanding of individual issues and circumstances leading to more specialized programs. The discussion below outlines common contributing factors to women veterans' barriers to services and support.



**Joining Forces for Women Veterans
Homelessness Issue Brief (page 3 of 4)**

To limit homelessness and support homeless women veterans, additional research, programs, and partnerships are needed. Ensuring women veterans' access to housing demonstrates a national commitment to our service members. Women veterans are entitled to assistance in securing appropriate housing for themselves and their families as they reintegrate to civilian life, and it is the responsibility of business and government leaders to recognize the political and economic value of this assistance. When human capital resources are misallocated, companies forfeit talented workers and productivity, and our nation's competitive potential is compromised.

Promising Practices and Lessons Learned

Transitional Housing

[Operation Home Front](#), funded jointly by the Veterans' Administration and Florida's Department of Children and Families in Cocoa, Florida provides integrated services to help residents address warfare trauma and substance abuse, gain employment, and transition to permanent housing. The facility fosters a safe, nurturing community, housing 28 homeless women veterans and their children together. Residents and their children receive individualized support in an environment that encourages bonding and mentoring.

Reintegration

Created in 1987 under the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program ([HVRP](#)) is the only federal program dedicated to providing employment assistance to homeless veterans. HVRP provides employment-focused services including job placement, training, job development, career counseling, and resume preparation. HVRP also partners with organizations to provide support services, access to shelter, food, clothing, and transportation. With more than 20 years of experience, HVRP recognizes the following best practices for addressing the complex needs of this target population:

- **Community Collaboration.** No single government agency can provide the array of services required to meet homeless veterans' needs. HVRP programs rely on partnerships with local government agencies in conjunction with community and faith-based organizations. Strong network collaboration is the single most important strategy for enhancing the quality of services provided through HVRP programs.
- **Comprehensive Assessments and Reports.** Client assessment and progress reports are used to identify individual needs and individual performance plans. These reports are key to development of planning, monitoring and evaluation tools at the individual and organizational levels.
- **Developing Employment Opportunities.** HVRP programs recognize the importance of not only preparing homeless veterans for the workforce but also developing employment opportunities for their clients. To ensure employment opportunities for clients, HVRP programs establish cooperative agreements with local businesses, job-specific training through HVRP grantee facilities, and on-the-job training facilitated by employer support services.

**Joining Forces for Women Veterans
Homelessness Issue Brief (page 4 of 4)**

Discussion Questions

- 1.) What are the challenges facing women veterans in our community?
- 2.) Are any of them homeless? How is this information being tracked and reported?
- 3.) What resources are currently available in our community for homeless women veterans?
- 4.) What can we do to bridge the employment gap, to enable women veterans find meaningful employment in the civilian world, and help them afford housing?
- 5.) What stories/experiences can women veterans in our community share about their experiences with homelessness? What worked for them, and what didn't?

Recommended Reading

Joining Forces for Women Veterans Inaugural Summit Report, October 21, 2010, Issued in Spring 2011, by Business and Professional Women's Foundation.

www.womenjoiningforces.org

Goddard, Jacqui. "Operation Home Front Helps Women Veterans Heal." The Christian Science Monitor, April 27, 2010. <http://bit.ly/aw9Qxh>

Mulhall, Erin. "Supporting She 'Who Has Borne the Battle.'" Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. Issue Report, October 2009.

http://media.iava.org/IAVA_WomensReport_2009.pdf

U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau. "Homeless Women Veterans Listening Sessions." <http://www.dol.gov/wb/programs/listeningsessions.htm>

U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. "Homelessness among Veterans." USICH Briefing Paper, June 2010.

http://www.ich.gov/PDF/OpeningDoors/BkgrdPap_Veterans.pdf

Washington, Donna L. et al. "Risk Factors for Homelessness among Women Veterans." Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved 21 (2010): 81-91.

<http://bit.ly/d1qi3W>



Joining Forces for Women Veterans
Family and Community Reintegration Issue Brief (page 1 of 3)

Women represent almost 10% of the military and are the fastest growing veteran population. Yet, tools and programs are still largely designed with men in mind and not tailored to meet the unique needs of women veterans. Gender shapes men and women’s military experiences as well as their multi-dimensional transition, which is heavily influenced by veterans’ ability to resume and/or restart their civilian lives. The discussion below explores gender-based obstacles to women veterans’ successful reintegration back into family and community life and provides promising practices for addressing those constraints.

Reintegration, housing and employment challenges are interconnected and have compounding effects. Supporting successful family and community reintegration of women veterans requires supporting them as whole beings and addressing their economic, social, mental and physical needs. Only holistic efforts will lead to successful transitions for women veterans. To begin with, it is important to understand the types of challenges they face.

The three obstacles to reintegration highlighted below – social isolation, family tension, and physical, mental, and emotional trauma – are not exhaustive, but offer a broad overview of reintegration constraints experienced by women veterans. Contributing factors are suggested for each, including access barriers, faulty and harmful beliefs and perceptions, and social expectations regarding gender roles and responsibilities. To design effective support programs for women veterans, it is imperative that we understand the root causes of the difficulties they encounter.

Social Isolation: Women veterans report feeling isolated and invisible. The following are contributing factors:

- **Public perceptions.** The public still widely regards veterans as men. Consequently, women veterans often lack the same recognition and respect for their service.
- **Social expectations about appropriate behavior for women.** Women veterans often have to change the way they talk, act and dress in order to assimilate into civilian life.
- **Lack of support network.** When women leave the service they often lose a support structure and sense of camaraderie. They often lack peer support groups comprised of women veterans who can understand and relate to their experiences.

Family Tension: Renewing relationships takes time. Women veterans report experiencing difficulty transitioning from soldier to mother, spouse, partner, and daughter because of the following factors:

- **Gender roles and responsibilities.** When women return home, they often shoulder greater parenting and domestic responsibilities than their male counterparts.
- **Lack of time to decompress.** Family members often possess unrealistic expectations that women veterans can and will immediately return to their "old selves."
- **Lack of access to services.** Women veterans often lack access to women's health care services, post-deployment readjustment and counseling services, and family counseling services.

Physical, Mental and Emotional Trauma: Women veterans return home with physical, mental and emotional wounds. Women experience higher rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than men. What's more, one in four women veterans have experienced sexual assault while in the military. The following factors limit women veterans' ability to receive the help they need:

- **Lack of knowledge.** Women are often unaware of their eligibility to veteran benefits and services.
- **Lack of access to mental health care and women's health care.** A recent study found that the nearest VA site did not offer mental health care for approximately 40% of women veterans. In addition, approximately 60% of the nearest VA sites did not offer women's health care.
- **Perceptions.** The VA is perceived as "unwelcoming" to women.

**Joining Forces for Women Veterans
Family and Community Reintegration Issue Brief (page 3 of 3)**

Discussion Questions

- 1.) What are the challenges facing women veterans in our community?
- 2.) What reintegration services are available to women veterans in our community?
- 3.) What stories/experiences can women veterans in our community share about their experiences with reintegration and transition assistance programs? What worked for them and what didn't?
- 4.) Is there a local VA hospital available that provides support services (healthcare, mental health, sexual trauma) for women veterans? What experiences have women veterans had utilizing these services?
- 5.) As an organization, can you identify women veterans in your community and in your state? Have you reached out to a local veteran service organization to find out what they are doing to support women veterans?

Recommended Reading

Joining Forces for Women Veterans Inaugural Summit Report, October 21, 2010, Issued in Spring 2011, by Business and Professional Women's Foundation.

www.womenjoiningforces.org

Collins, Elizabeth M. "Surviving Sexual Assault." United States Army, September 1, 2010. <http://bit.ly/a3phkC>

Fitzpatrick, Laura. "How We're Failing Our Female Veterans." Time Magazine, June 30, 2010. <http://bit.ly/cbW12P>

Foster, Lisa K. and Scott Vince. "California's Women Veterans: The Challenges and Needs of Those Who Served." California Research Bureau, August 2009. <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/09/09-009.pdf>

Lange, Gudrun. "Pilot Study of Reintegration and Service Needs for Women Veteran Mothers." Health Services Research & Development Service Study. United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2008. <http://bit.ly/b2SSqV>

Mulhall, Erin. "Supporting She 'Who Has Borne the Battle.'" Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. Issue Report, October 2009. http://media.iava.org/IAVA_WomensReport_2009.pdf

Other Resources:

U.S. Government's Transition Assistance Program: <http://www.taonline.com/TapOffice/>

U.S. Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service:
<http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/>

Connect-A-Vet Resources: http://www.bpwfoundation.org/index.php/issues/connect_a_vet



**Joining Forces for Women Veterans
Employment and Careers Issue Brief (page 1 of 7)**

Women veterans are a growing and important part of the U.S. Labor Force. In 1980, there were 1.1 million women veterans, and by 2008, there were 1.8 million. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reports that more than 150,000 women will be transitioning out of the military over the next few years, many of whom will be disabled and seeking jobs that capitalize on their skills and talents beyond their disabilities.

Women have achieved great success in the military with opportunities to advance and hold high-ranking positions, but they often find it difficult to leverage their military skills into meaningful civilian careers. Aside from the difficulties of the current economy, women veterans often encounter inconsistent or inaccessible transition resources, misperceptions by employers and co-workers about their skills, along with work readiness and readjustment challenges. The United States cannot afford to ignore the potential this highly skilled group of working women can contribute to the economy as employees and employers.

Recruiting women veterans is smart business. The military has expended extensive resources to train them to be skilled, efficient, inventive, disciplined, and adaptable employees. General David Petraeus explained the appeal of hiring veterans best when he said, “Tell me anywhere in the business world where a 22 or 23-year-old is responsible for 35 or 40 individuals on missions that involve life and death. Their tactical actions can have strategic implications for the overall mission.” [A special advertising supplement in Forbes Magazine](#) recently described a “War for Talent” in which companies looking for leaders are turning to skilled military veterans who bring honor, dedication and teamwork to the workplace. Beyond the many benefits of employing women veterans, we also know that investing in women veterans as entrepreneurs is smart economics. Veteran-owned businesses account for 14% of U.S. small businesses.

81 The percentage of military jobs with direct civilian equivalents

70 The percentage of women veterans who have some college education compared to only 57% of veteran men

70 The percentage rate at which women veterans’ unemployment rose from Jan ‘09 to Jan ‘10. (Veteran men’s unemployment rate rose 25% over the same time period)

11.2 The percentage of unemployed women veterans as of Jan ‘10, compared to 9.4% of male veterans

2 The multiply by which a woman veteran aged 18-24 is likely to experience unemployment than a non-veteran woman

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Employment and Careers Issue Brief (page 2 of 7)**

Data is not readily available on the number of businesses owned by women veterans. We do know, however, that women in the military possess an enterpreneurial mindset, are proactive and goal-oriented, and they get the job done using resources effectively. Women veterans have experience making decisions in the face of significant ambiguity and uncertainty. They understand the importance of having an alternate plan and are willing and able to adapt. These traits align with key characteristics of successful business owners. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, nearly one quarter of veterans indicate they are interested in either starting or buying their own businesses, and that number is even higher among women veterans. To support this, the U.S. Small Business Administration launched a “Women Veterans Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship ([V-WISE](#))” program, focusing on training, networking and mentorship for women veterans. In partnership with Syracuse University, they are also expanding an [Entrepreneurship Boot Camp \(EBV\) for veterans with disabilities](#). Women veterans as a potential entrepreneurial force should not be overlooked. New research, programs, and policies are needed to increase the participation of women veterans as entrepreneurs and improve vertical linkages for existing women veteran-owned businesses.

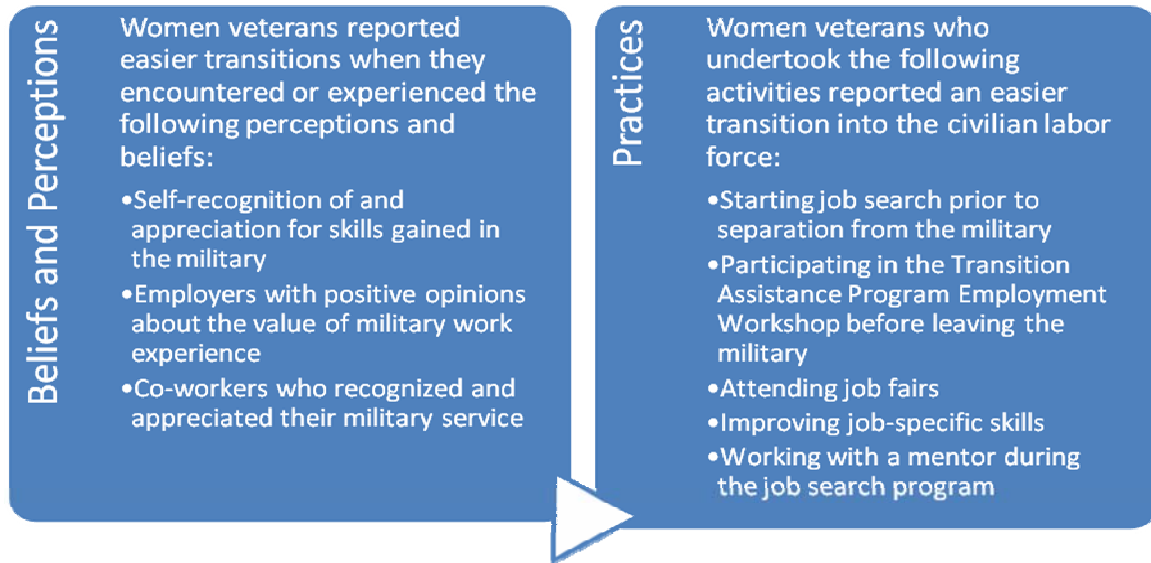
The wealth of training and experience women veterans bring to the civilian workplace as potential employees and employers is under-utilized when women’s unique transition needs are ignored. They return from the military with multiple issues facing them as family caregivers, single breadwinners, and are often scarred by the challenges they faced during their military service. Given the growing economic importance of women veterans as a population, it is time for public agencies and private companies to share the risks and rewards of supporting women veterans. BPW Foundation sees solutions through the strength of public-private partnerships, political will, and leadership commitments.

Factors That Ease the Transition Process

In 2007, [BPW Foundation conducted a national study of more than 1,600 women veterans](#) that included an online survey, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. The pilot study resulted in public discussions about the creation of programs and services that work for women veterans and their employers throughout the entire transition process. Further research conducted by BPW Foundation and others confirms findings that the successful reintegration of women veterans calls for a tri-partite response — from the government, private, and non-profit sectors — to provide *evidence-based* solutions to reintegration needs.

The study also found that various *individual attributes* influence the ease with which women veterans transition back into the civilian workplace. Key characteristics include education level, marital status, and presence of dependents. Those with college degrees found jobs sooner, and were able to land the *right* jobs more often. BPW Foundation’s study also explored *contributing factors* for successful re-entry into the

civilian labor force. The two categories of factors — perceptions and beliefs and practices — are described in the chart below.



How to Support Women Veterans

Supporting women veterans requires a multi-pronged approach including research activities, employment transition programs, employer practices and policies.

Research	Transition Programs
<p>Opportunities for additional research include studies that explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-based constraints to women veterans’ transition back into the civilian labor force • Success stories and lessons learned at the organizational and individual level on how to support successful career transition and adjustment. • Challenges and impact on women veterans resuming a caregiver role when returning home, and supports needed • Impact of access to business and professional networks in facilitating women veterans’ job search and adjustment process • Characteristics of women veteran-owned businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career transition assistance to include skill assessments and understanding of how to transfer military skills to civilian careers • Awareness, resource referrals, and training for entrepreneurship exploration and opportunities • Linkages and networking opportunities for women veterans through the VA or community-based sources • Community college and other training program access and guidance for women veterans including social network or on-site opportunities • One stop transition services through partnerships for housing, employment, health, family and community reintegration

Policies	Employer Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate housing for women veterans to stabilize their lives and enable effective job search and work commitments • Ensuring women veterans are aware of and have access to veterans’ benefits in a timely fashion • Respite/transition period for women veterans as they separate from the military before they must re-enter the civilian workforce • Expanded funding and support for women veterans pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities • Incentives for federal, state and local public private partnerships to assist women veterans in transition and reintegration • Equal Pay guarantees to ensure standard of living maintenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize job boards and job fairs targeted to women veteran audiences • Ensure that recruiters are knowledgeable about transferable skills and transition challenges to target efforts accordingly • Develop hiring campaigns targeted at women veterans • Monitor and evaluate employee women veteran statistics • Train human resource professionals to be advocates as needed in assuring women veterans receive their entitled VA benefits • Develop career transition assistance targeted at women veterans (e.g. apprenticeship, internship, or leadership training programs) • Implement mentorship activities • Develop business and professional networks or resource groups for women veterans • Provide flexible scheduling • Use women veteran-owned businesses as preferred vendors • Ensure practices fully support women veterans and their unique needs and challenges

Promising Practices

Research
<p>Business and Professional Women’s Foundation, <i>Women Veterans in Transition</i> Research Project</p> <p>In 2007, Business and Professional Women’s (BPW) Foundation completed the first study of women veterans and their unique needs during transition. View the resulting white paper in its entirety at www.WomenJoiningForces.org. In response to the obvious need for additional spotlights on women veterans as a distinct grouping of working women, In October 2010, BPW Foundation held an Inaugural Summit: Joining Forces for Women Veterans. Click here to view the resulting white paper in its entirety (or visit the Women Joining Forces website link above).</p>

Recruitment

GE, Junior Officer Leadership Program

In 1996, GE launched the Junior Officer Leadership Program (JOLP). The two-year program attracts more than 1,000 applicants each year for just 15 to 20 spots. Women veterans currently comprise approximately 12% of program participants. The program allows participants to work three 8-month rotations in any functional area of the company. JOLP offers participants flexibility to choose where, when and how they work. The program is designed to help veterans gain experience in a corporation without forfeiting other life goals and responsibilities. GE has attracted highly qualified candidates who, because of their military service, are not only disciplined and experienced, but also possess a strong work ethic and orientation toward problem resolution. JOLP has the highest retention rate of all GE's leadership programs. At the five year mark, 86% of JOLP participants are still employed by GE.

After 14 years of implementation and 250 participants, GE offers these tips to employers interested in developing their own Junior Officer Leadership Program:

1. **Support.** Top executive support is essential. If the CEO does not broadcast his or her support for the program, the initiative will not receive adequate support down the line.
2. **Location.** Family and camaraderie are important to veterans. Look for opportunities to start programs in locations where there is a strong network of former military personnel.
3. **Structure.** Make sure the program is disciplined and structured and has documented processes, milestones, and benchmarks.
4. **Ownership.** Provide opportunities for participants to build on the program by listening to and acting upon their suggested improvements.

Affinity Groups

Military service members share many bonding experiences as they move through specific stages of uniform training, creating a cohesive community that can rely upon one another. Once a woman veteran has left the military, though, she may find herself alone in her community, shunned by her new co-workers who don't understand her service background, and adrift amongst those that would have her slide back into civilian life with little recognition of transition pains. As with any specific experience in life, spending time with those that are either traveling the same path you are, or have successfully navigated it already is extremely beneficial.

Employers interested in capitalizing on the broad and valuable experience women veterans bring to the table can easily foster a welcoming environment within their organization by taking a few simple steps towards providing a safe, comfortable forum for their women veteran employees. Adjusting intake processes to include identifying women veterans upon hiring, assigning them a "buddy" within the company, either another woman veteran, or if one is not available, a male veteran, that can assist the woman veteran in acclimating to the civilian culture, and last, but probably most important, providing the time and space, or even an online presence for women veterans to network. Encouraging this [affinity networking](#) can aid in opening lines of

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Employment and Careers Issue Brief (page 6 of 7)**

communication and promote workplace satisfaction, thereby aiding in employee satisfaction, and in turn, long-term retention.

[Mentoring](#) also plays a very important role in creating a supportive workplace environment for women veterans. The following issue brief on Mentoring outlines the numerous benefits this practice has for both the woman veteran employee, and their employer, as they transition back to the civilian workforce.

Discussion Questions

- 1.) As an employer, can you identify the women (and men) veterans on your staff? How many are there? Who are they? What types of positions do they hold?
- 2.) As an employer, do you have (or can you initiate) mentoring and networking activities for women veteran employees and their co-workers?
- 3.) Does your human resources department have training to deal with veteran-related issues? Practical examples include leveraging military benefits with employer benefits. Other examples include policies that recognize and support post-traumatic stress syndrome.
- 4.) As an employee and a woman veteran, have you self-identified as a woman veteran? If not, why?
- 5.) As an employee and a woman veteran, can you share your experiences transitioning from a military to civilian career? What was helpful, what was not?
- 6.) As an employer/employee, have you participated in any career mentoring of women veterans? What recommendations can you share?

Recommended Reading

Joining Forces for Women Veterans Inaugural Summit Report, October 21, 2010, Issued in Spring 2011, by BPW Foundation. www.womenjoiningforces.org

Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Economic News Release: Employment Situation of Veterans Summary.” March 12, 2010. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm>.

BPW Foundation. “Building Strong Programs and Policies to Support Women Veterans.” A Briefing Paper from the Women Veterans in Transition Pilot Research Study. <http://bit.ly/csh1Ti>

BPW Foundation. “Understanding the Complexity of Women Veterans’ Career Transitions.” Women Veterans in Transition Pilot Research Study, 2007. <http://bit.ly/9cpzAW>

**Joining Forces for Women Veterans
Employment and Careers Issue Brief (page 7 of 7)**

O’Keefe, Brian. “Battle-tested: From Soldier to Business Leader.” Fortune, March 8, 2010. <http://bit.ly/dyX3CO>

Women Veterans in Transition Research Project, BPW Foundation, 2007
http://www.bpwfoundation.org/index.php/resources/women_veterans_project

BPW Foundation Summit Report summary chart (page 15 of the report) listing many possible steps for supporting women veterans.
http://www.bpwfoundation.org/documents/uploads/JFWV_Final_Summit_Report.pdf

Employer Tips to Tackle a Worker’s Military Deployment, Associated Press
<http://www.bpwfoundation.org/documents/uploads/EmployerTipstoTackleaReturningVet.pdf>

Untapped Talent: Women Veterans, Successful Workplaces Digest, BPW Foundation
http://www.bpwfoundation.org/documents/uploads/untappedtalent_SW.pdf

Other Resources:

Top Ten Recommendations for Employers to Support Women Veterans in the Workplace, BPW Foundation website
<http://www.bpwfoundation.org/documents/uploads/EmployerTop10RecommendationsWV.pdf>

America’s Heroes at Work – Hiring Veterans Toolkit, U.S. Department of Labor
<http://www.americasheroesatwork.gov/forEmployers/HiringToolkit>

Joining Forces.gov (U.S. Government Initiative)
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/joiningforces/>

United We Serve – Support for Veterans Toolkit
<http://www.serve.gov/toolkits/veterans/index.asp>

Women Veterans Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship (V-WISE), U.S. Small Business Administration and Syracuse University program <http://www.whitman.syr.edu/vwise/>

Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities (EBV), U.S. Small Business Administration and Syracuse University program, <http://whitman.syr.edu/ebv/>

Career Center, BPW Foundation
http://www.bpwfoundation.org/index.php/resources/career_center



Joining Forces for Women Veterans Mentoring Issue Brief (page 1 of 5)

Taking off the military uniform can be a monumental event, a daunting task for both men and women. After encountering gender biases and proving themselves repeatedly (to their male peers, throughout their training, and every day on the job), many women veterans think leaving the service and entering the civilian workforce will be an easy ending of their journey. Even when they have achieved great success breaking through barriers in the military, an unacceptably high number of women veterans return home to face seemingly insurmountable challenges transitioning their military skills and experiences to civilian employment.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates that there are 1.8 million women veterans, with another 150,000 women scheduled to exit the service within the next ten years. Women represent almost 10% of the military and are the fastest growing veteran population. They have reached critical mass in the labor force, but are in critical need of additional support to transition from active duty to productive civilian careers. Unfortunately, transition tools and programs are still largely designed with men in mind and do not necessarily meet the unique needs of women veterans.

Moreover, some women veterans will be disabled and bear scars of trauma seen and inflicted during their service. These women will need special assistance in seeking jobs that capitalize on their skills and talents beyond their disabilities.

Even those veterans who are able to find adequate employment upon exiting the service need help understanding how to conduct themselves in a civilian culture that does not necessarily treat them as equals or recognize the skills and accolades they garnered in the military world. Available employment services may be unaware of the roles women play in the military and unable to assist women in assimilating their military experiences to applicable job openings.

Aside from the difficulties of the current economy, women veterans encounter inconsistent or inaccessible transition resources, misperceptions by employers and co-workers about their skills and work readiness, and readjustment challenges.

**Joining Forces for Women Veterans
Mentoring Issue Brief (page 2 of 5)**

The Benefits of Mentoring Women Veterans

A positive, low-cost, and high-impact vehicle to create mutual success is the development and promotion of a mentor/mentee initiative. [Mentoring](#) leads to better individual performance on the job, more rapid advancement within the organization, and a higher rate of job and career satisfaction. These advantages are useful for both the employee and the employer—mentored employees have a much higher retention rate, leading to lower turnover costs and company retention of learned skill, which equals lower training costs.

Another benefit of mentoring is the transfer of knowledge from one generation to another, while fostering cross-generational relationships and information sharing. This is the first time in American history that four different generations have worked shoulder-to-shoulder in the workplace, and the creation of a cooperative, mutually beneficial method to communicate may assist in overcoming some of the barriers and challenges associated with this phenomena.

Mentors can also guide the sometimes bewildering process for career advancement. In the military, the to-do list for promotion is clearly defined. If one checks the appropriate boxes in a timely manner, promotion is sure to follow. In today's business world, the path to promotion is more complicated and requires coaching and support at every point along the way. A strong mentor can assist a mentee in setting personalized strategic goals and mapping out day-to-day tactics to achieve them. This priceless guidance can ease the stress of transition and aid in long-term success and career satisfaction.

BPW Foundation's Role in Mentoring Women Veterans

For over a hundred years, BPW Foundation has focused on bettering the lives of working women through research, education, and programs designed to support successful workplaces and create empowered employees. In recognizing the distinct role women veterans play in society today, BPW Foundation has undertaken the mission of ensuring each woman has access to tools for success. BPW Foundation's goal is to help women veterans translate their talents by linking them to scholarships and professional development opportunities that can open doors to a rewarding career.

BPW Foundation's October, 2010 Joining Forces for Women Veterans [Inaugural Summit](#) identified an ongoing need for women veterans to find informed, trusted outlets to assess their goals and help them navigate their way to successful careers. To that end, BPW Foundation launched the [Joining Forces for Women Veterans Mentorship Program](#). In collaboration with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and working with public and private partners, this program will develop the tools, outreach and capacity to engage 10,000 women mentors to connect with women veterans and military spouses. The Office of the First Lady has highlighted this "mentorship gap" in their selection of BPW Foundation as the point organization for this large-scale mentoring initiative.

**Joining Forces for Women Veterans
Mentoring Issue Brief (page 3 of 5)**

Women of all ages, from all business backgrounds will help women veterans navigate the challenge of securing a job that utilizes their unique skills. Beyond the actual job search, they will offer professional support and coaching, as women are chronically unequally paid and under-represented in the upper echelons of business. The JFWV Summit Report highlighted the need for solutions addressing the obstacles faced by women veterans that are informed, holistic, collaborative, and community-based. The mentorship program will include these important criteria.

Having ascertained years ago that the transition process for women veterans was not simple or succinct, BPW Foundation sponsored a “Dear Jane” letter-writing campaign, featuring messages from female veterans who had completed the transition journey to those just beginning it. These letters, filled with practical advice and examples of courage and strength, opened the eyes of many to the need for diligence during the transition process.

The innovative *Joining Forces* Mentorship Program is another vehicle for BPW Foundation to foster women helping women. BPW Foundation is developing several different tiers of mentoring, as we recognize the need for unique programming that addresses existing needs. To this end, we foresee offering three formats: a traditional relationship (mentor-to-mentee), a peer-to-peer offering (allowing those in similar circumstances to share best practices and successful strategies), and a woman business-owner to woman business-owner or owner-to-be match up. By approaching mentoring from multiple angles, we hope to capitalize on the inherent strengths of the women veteran community.

How to Support Mentoring of Women Veterans

Support for mentoring women veterans can be as broad as joining the national initiative, [JFWV Mentorship Program](#), or as simple as beginning an internal mentorship program at your organization. The goal is to foster beneficial relationships for women veterans by providing access to mentoring programs and career coaching. To learn more about ways to support women veterans in your organization and in your community, please review the suggestions below or contact BPW Foundation directly at foundation@bpwfoundation.org or (202) 293-1100.

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Employers	Organizations	Individuals, including Veterans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the women veterans on your staff. How many are there? Who are they? What types of positions do they hold? • Organize brown bag lunches for women veterans where they can share their transition experiences. • Host roundtables with diversity officers to discuss best practices for recruiting and retaining women veterans. • Create a women veterans' affinity group. • Develop mentoring programs and career coaching tools specifically for women veterans. • Support the National Fund for Women Veterans to ensure coordination and expansion of quality programs. • Participate in local public-private partnerships to ensure coordination and access to service for women veterans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify women veterans in your community and your state. Initiate networking and mentoring activities. Examine your local and state women veterans' support services and resources. How accessible are they in location, hours, and scope to meet needs? • Advocate through tracking and providing input on policies affecting women veterans and supports tailored to their needs. • Encourage and engage in collaboration among service providers to address all aspects of needs directly or through referrals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer at local veterans service organizations. Find out what they are doing to support women veterans and how you can help. • Seek out other women veterans for networking and awareness through veteran businesswomen-related organizations. • Report concerns and problems using any of the VA related systems. • Educate yourself and others about the distinct issues affecting women veterans. • Consider donating resources to women veteran-related causes.

Discussion Questions

- 1.) As an employer, can you identify the women (and men) veterans on your staff? How many are there? Who are they? What types of positions do they hold?
- 2.) As an employer, do you have (or can you initiate) mentoring and networking activities for women veteran employees and their co-workers?
- 3.) As an employer, what best practices you can share about mentoring veterans?

- 4.) As a veteran, have you had (or been) a mentor? What was your experience?
- 5.) As a veteran, how did you access career advice/mentorship resources?

Resources

Joining Forces for Women Veterans Summary Report issued February 2011,
http://www.bpwfoundation.org/documents/uploads/JFWV_Final_Summit_Report.pdf

Joining Forces for Women Veterans Mentoring Program: www.womenjoiningforces.org

“4 Reasons to Have a Mentor for Military/Veterans,” Military.com,
<http://www.military.com/education/content/getting-your-degree/4-reasons-to-find-a-mentor.html>

Wharton School of Business U of Penn—Value of Mentoring,
<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=1736>

Working with a mentor—benefits, ASAE Associations Now, April 2010,
<http://www.asaecenter.org/Resources/ANowDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=48529>

Career Value of a Mentor, ASAE Associations Now, July 2009,
<http://www.asaecenter.org/Resources/ANowDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=42794>

Women’s Ways of Mentoring, Fast Company, August 1998,
<http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/17/womentoring.html?page=0%2C0>

America’s Heroes at Work – Hiring Veterans Toolkit, U.S. Department of Labor
<http://www.americasheroesatwork.gov/forEmployers/HiringToolkit>

Top Ten Recommendations for Employers to Support Women in the Workplace
<http://www.bpwfoundation.org/documents/uploads/EmployerTop10RecommendationsWV.pdf>

Joining Forces.gov (U.S. Government Initiative)
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/joiningforces/>