



Joining Forces for Women Veterans Employment and Careers Issue Brief March, 2012

Women veterans represent an important, and growing, segment of the U.S. labor force. Since 1980, the population of women veterans has grown 65% to 1.8 million, and an anticipated 150,000 additional women are projected to leave the military in the next five years. By 2020, women veterans will comprise 10% of the nation's veterans, a uniquely qualified population seeking civilian jobs that capitalize on their military training and skills.

Military women have achieved great success in the service, advancing to high positions of responsibility and leadership. However, women veterans often find it difficult to translate and leverage their military skills into meaningful civilian jobs and careers. In addition to the difficulties created by the current economy, women veterans often encounter inconsistent or inaccessible transition support and resources, misperceptions by employers and co-workers about their training and competence, along with work readiness and readjustment challenges. This highly-skilled, motivated group of working women has the potential to make meaningful contributions throughout the U.S. economy—as both employees and employers.

Recruiting women veterans is smart business. The military has invested extensive resources to prepare and train them to be productive, 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.” Military women are leaders, managers, and team members, serving in 95% of military positions alongside their male counterparts.

Investing in women veterans as entrepreneurs is smart economics. Veteran-owned businesses account for 14% of U.S. small businesses, though specific data is not readily available on the number owned by women veterans. We do know that military women possess an enterpreneurial mindset, are proactive, efficient, and goal-oriented. They get the job done using resources effectively. Women veterans have experience making important decisions under pressure and in the face of ambiguity and uncertainty. They understand the importance of having an alternate plan and are willing and able to adapt, traits that align with key characteristics of successful business owners. Small businesses account for 50% of the total non-farm gross domestic product, and economic programs and policies should support increased participation of women veterans as well as improve vertical linkages for existing women veteran-owned businesses.

81 Percent of military jobs with direct civilian counterparts

70 Percent of women veterans who have some college education, compared to 57% of male veterans

9.4 Percent of unemployed women veterans in the first quarter of 2012, unchanged from 2011. Male veterans' corresponding 7.2% unemployment rate dropped 38% from year ago

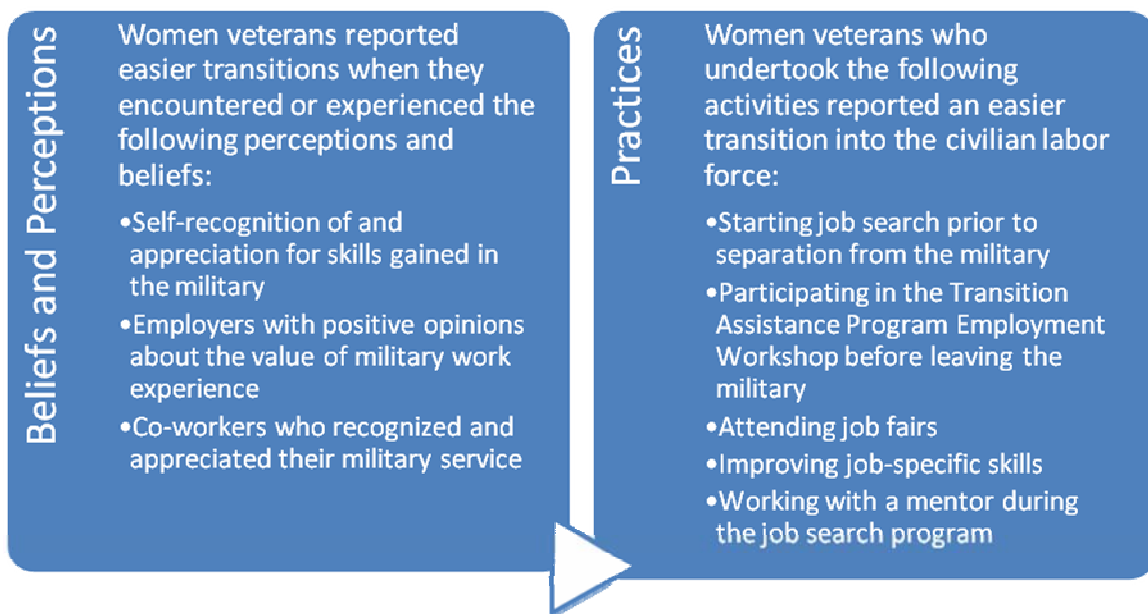
16.8 Percent of unemployed women veterans during the fourth quarter of 2011, compared to 13.1% for the total veteran population

2 Number of times a woman veteran aged 18-24 is likely to experience unemployment than a non-veteran

When women veterans' unique transition needs are ignored, the wealth of training and experience they bring to the civilian workplace is under-utilized. Women veterans too-often return from the military with scars from their service and multiple issues facing them as family caregivers and single breadwinners. Given the growing economic importance of women veterans, it is time for public agencies and private companies to share the responsibility for supporting women veterans in the workplace. Business and Professional Women's (BPW) Foundation sees solutions through the strength of public-private partnerships that result in corporate and political leadership commitments.

Factors That Ease the Transition Process

BPW Foundation's landmark 2007 research of more than 1,600 transitioning women veterans found that various individual attributes influence the ease with which women veterans reintegrate in the civilian workplace. Key characteristics include education level, marital status, and presence of dependents. Having a college degree, for example, correlates positively with both finding a job sooner and finding the *right* job. The study also explored contributing factors for successful re-entry into the civilian labor force, with two categories of factors:



How to Support Women Veterans

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

Research	Transition Programs
<p>Opportunities for additional research include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-based constraints to women veterans' transition into the civilian labor force • Success stories and lessons learned at the organizational and individual levels to support successful career transition and adjustment. • Impact on women veterans of resuming a caregiver role when returning home, and support needed • Impact of access to mentoring and networks in facilitating women veterans' job search and adjustment • Characteristics of women veteran-owned businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career transition mentoring and assistance, including translation and portability of skills and experience • Awareness, resource referrals, and training for entrepreneurship exploration and opportunities • Linkages and networking for women veterans through the VA or community-based sources • Community college and other training access and guidance for women veterans, including social networking • 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 while they stabilize their lives, search for jobs, and balance family and work commitments • Availability, awareness, and timely access to benefits for women veterans • Adequate respite/transition time as women veterans separate from the military and re-enter the civilian workforce • Available funding and support for women veterans pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities • Available incentives for federal, state and local public private partnerships to assist women veterans during transition and reintegration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize job boards and job fairs targeted to women veteran audiences • Ensure recruiters are knowledgeable about portability of skills and transition challenges • Develop hiring campaigns to reach women veterans • Monitor/evaluate employee women veteran statistics • Train human resource professionals as advocates to assure women veterans receive their entitled benefits • Develop career transition assistance tailored to women veterans (e.g. apprenticeship, internship, leadership training programs) • Implement mentoring activities • Develop business and professional networks and/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

Recommended Reading

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

Business and Professional Women’s 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/cshITi>

Business and Professional Women’s Foundation. “Top Ten Recommendations for Employers.” Women Veterans in Transition Research Project. <http://bit.ly/9qgyL4>

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

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