



**House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

**Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity**

**Hearing on Veteran Employment Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Supplemental documents for the testimony of Thomas R. Winkel, Director, Arizona Coalition for Military Families on May 26, 2021:**

- Statement of Support for the Arizona Roadmap to Veteran Employment, Governor Doug Ducey, 2015
- Arizona Roadmap to Veteran Employment, 2015
- Arizona Veteran Career Year Proclamation, Governor Doug Ducey, 2017
- Letter to Arizona Veteran Supportive Employers from U.S. Senator Kyrsten Sinema, 2021
- Phoenix Business Journal Op-ed, Hiring veterans, military family members makes Arizona's economy stronger, Thomas Winkel, April 2021
- How Congress can respond to Covid-19 Challenges on Veteran Workforce, Recommendations from the Arizona Commerce Authority and Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity, 2021
- Arizona Veteran Employment Vignettes, 2021
- Arizona Veteran Workforce Support Video Links, 2021



DOUGLAS A. DUCEY  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF ARIZONA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

**Statement of Support for the Arizona Roadmap to Veteran Employment**

Arizona is home to more than 625,000 service members and veterans from all branches and eras of service. These individuals and their families have proven to be a valuable asset to our state and our workforce.

During the last several years, unemployment, underemployment and retention among this population have been of growing concern. At a time when more resources are focused on this issue than ever before, there are still gaps in the process of military-affiliated job seekers gaining and maintaining employment.

The Arizona Roadmap to Veteran Employment, developed in partnership by the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, Arizona Coalition for Military Families and many public and private sector partners and stakeholders, is a comprehensive statewide effort that focuses on connecting service members, veterans and their family members to employment opportunities, training and resources.

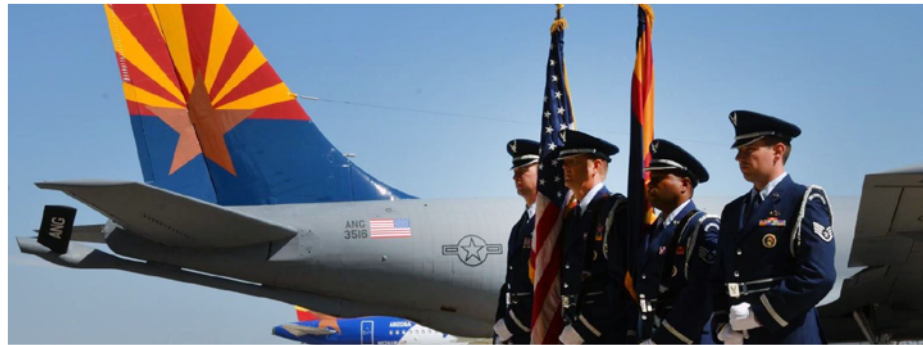
I fully support this important initiative and encourage all state governmental entities as well as their private sector counterparts to do the following:

- Adopt the guidelines set forth in the Arizona Roadmap to Veteran Employment to the fullest extent possible.
- Work collaboratively with the military/veteran community to ensure that the needs of our service members, veterans and their families are being met.
- Appreciate and promote the unique values and skillsets that service members and their families bring to the civilian workforce.
- Become educated on how the unique aspects of military/veteran culture affect the process of finding and maintaining employment so that our brave men and women in uniform can live fulfilling, successful civilian lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas A. Ducey".

Douglas A. Ducey  
Governor  
State of Arizona





## ARIZONA ROADMAP TO VETERAN EMPLOYMENT:

A STATEWIDE PLAN TO CONNECT SERVICE MEMBERS, VETERANS & THEIR FAMILIES TO EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND RESOURCES

**Recommendations and next steps for:**  
**Job Seekers • Employment Service Providers**  
**Employers • Community Members**



# ARIZONA ROADMAP TO VETERAN EMPLOYMENT:

A STATEWIDE PLAN TO CONNECT SERVICE  
MEMBERS, VETERANS & THEIR FAMILIES TO  
EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND RESOURCES

**Recommendations and next steps for:**  
**Job Seekers · Employment Service Providers**  
**Employers · Community Members**





## INTRODUCTION

**Arizona is home to over 625,000 service members and veterans from all branches and eras of service. These individuals and their families are a great asset to our state and our workforce.**

Over the last several years, unemployment and underemployment among this population has been a continuing concern. At a time when more resources are focused on this issue than ever before, there are still gaps in the process of military-affiliated job seekers gaining employment.

In order to effectively focus our efforts statewide, key stakeholders have contributed to the development of the **Arizona Roadmap to Veteran Employment**. This initiative encompasses job seekers, employment service providers, employers and the community at all levels; the overall goal is to clearly identify action steps for each group in order to connect service members, veterans and their family members to employment opportunities, training and resources.

This is an entirely Arizona led and developed initiative and is the first of its kind in the nation. While there are many positive efforts to promote veteran employment across the country, many have fallen short of enacting lasting changes. This comprehensive approach facilitates the systemic change that is necessary in order to produce a collective and sustainable impact, and provides a foundation for innovative solutions and partnerships.

Service members, veterans and their families bring valuable skills and experience to the nation's workforce. A renewed, collaborative, cross-sector focus on this issue will help ensure that every potential employee has the opportunity to be competitive in Arizona's workforce and give Arizona's employers the opportunity to fully benefit from their participation in the civilian workforce.

For more information and updates:  
[www.ArizonaCoalition.org/employment](http://www.ArizonaCoalition.org/employment)  
[roadmap@arizonacoalition.org](mailto:roadmap@arizonacoalition.org)

## ROADMAP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND PARTNERS

The Arizona Roadmap to Veteran Employment was developed in partnership by public and private sector organizations, with the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services and the Arizona Coalition for Military Families taking the lead role of convening stakeholders, collecting data and fully developing and implementing the plan. Development of the Roadmap included roundtables, an online survey and a feedback process from stakeholders statewide.



The **Arizona Department of Veterans' Services** is the state agency that enriches and honors Arizona's veterans and their families through education, advocacy and service. The department provides direct services to help veterans connect with their VA benefits through 19 Veterans Benefits Offices statewide; two skilled nursing Veteran Home facilities in Phoenix and Tucson; one Veterans' Memorial Cemetery in Sierra Vista with additional cemeteries planned in Northern Arizona and Marana; and a Fiduciary to provide conservator and guardian services for incapacitated veterans.

In addition, the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services provides critical, statewide coordination and technical assistance to public and private sector organizations serving veterans. This includes a focus on targeted populations such as veterans experiencing homelessness and women veterans, as well as partnering to build community capacity to address veteran employment and higher education.

**[DVS.AZ.gov](http://DVS.AZ.gov)**



The **Arizona Coalition for Military Families** is a nationally-recognized public/private partnership focused on building Arizona's statewide capacity to care for and support all service members, veterans, their families and communities. Since launching in 2009, the Coalition has been recognized as a best practice model by the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, National Guard Bureau, the Joining Forces Initiative, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Points of Light Foundation and other national stakeholders.

With a common vision of no wrong door and no wrong person, the Coalition facilitates coordination and collaboration among military, government and community organizations; provides training & technical assistance; and builds infrastructure to connect people and families to the right resource at the right time. The fiscal sponsor and administrative service organization for the Coalition is Empowerment Systems, Inc., an Arizona nonprofit and 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.

**[www.ArizonaCoalition.org](http://www.ArizonaCoalition.org)**

**"I still have a great deal of experience and knowledge to offer...I have a desire to continue working and being a productive citizen in this great country."**

— Job Seeker,  
*Arizona Roadmap Survey*

## WHAT ARE THE GOALS FOR THE ROADMAP?

### Job Seekers:

Job seekers and employees have access to information and support resources for their job search and career progression.

### Employment Service Providers:

Employment service providers are equipped with the training, contacts and resources to effectively assist job seekers with job search and barriers to employability.

### Employers:

Employers know the value of these employees, how to connect to this pool of job seekers and can effectively capitalize on and retain employees.

The Roadmap will also provide a platform for innovative solutions and partnerships and serve as a way to document and share best practices implemented by employers, employment service providers and other key partners.

## EMPLOYMENT EQUATION

The Roadmap is structured around an employment equation that focuses on the interests and needs of different key stakeholder groups, as well as the relationship between those stakeholders, with an end goal of successful hiring and retention.



### JOB SEEKERS

Unemployed, underemployed & relocating service members, veterans and family members



### EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS

Military, government and community employment assistance and support programs



### EMPLOYERS

A range of industries and sizes seeking to hire military-affiliated employees



### SUCCESSFUL HIRING & RETENTION

Connection to employment opportunities, training & resources



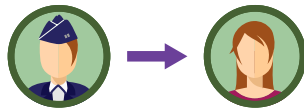




## WHO ARE THE JOB SEEKERS?

### Active Duty Service Members Transitioning from Military Service

This includes service members of all ages who are exiting the military at different stages of their career (e.g. 20+ years of service, medical retirement, less than 20 years of service).



### National Guard & Reserve Service Members

This includes those who are transitioning out of the military, as well as those who are continuing to serve on part-time status but seeking full-time employment.



### Veterans

This population includes those who are no longer serving in the military and is comprised of people spanning all age ranges.



### Spouses, Significant Others & Family Members

A recent national report indicated that 90 percent of active duty military spouses are underemployed. In addition to spouses, other family members may be experiencing challenges in finding employment that can negatively impact the well-being of the family.



The unemployment rate is disproportionately high for veterans ages 18 to 24.

— US Bureau of Labor Statistics



## FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT JOB SEARCH

### **What is their current status?**

Different challenges may arise for job seekers depending on whether they (or their family member) are serving on active duty, planning to transition out of the military, serving part-time in the Reserve/National Guard or already separated from the military.

### **What is their time of service?**

Time of service for military/veteran job seekers can vary, with some having served 4 years or fewer, while others have served for 20 years or more.

### **Where are they located?**

Job seekers may already be living where they wish to find employment, but many desire to relocate after leaving military service.

### **What are they accustomed to?**

Some service members and veterans have only experienced the military workplace (structured, full-time, ongoing access to training and education, clear paths for advancement, an environment of service), while others may also have experience in civilian workplaces before, during or after military service.

### **What are the unknown factors?**

Some job seekers may be experiencing personal issues that are not apparent to others, which could affect their ability to gain and maintain employment.

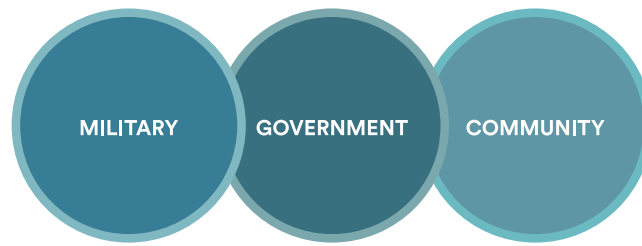
Benefits of Hiring Veterans:

**Advanced team-building skills, strong organizational commitment and experience in diverse work-settings.**

— The Business Case for Hiring a Veteran: Beyond the Clichés



## WHO ARE THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS?



**It is very common for service members, veterans, and their families to access resources in multiple systems of care.**

### **Military**

These programs offer assistance to currently serving military members, transitioning members and their families.

### **Government**

All levels of government (federal, state and local) provide various services designed to help people find employment. Some are focused exclusively on assisting military-affiliated job seekers, while others are available to everyone.

### **Community**

Private, community-based organizations (including both nonprofit and for-profit) provide employment services varying in size and scope depending on the agency. Some focus solely on helping job seekers find work, while others offer employment services as a part of their overall mission.

In addition to organizations that provide direct assistance for finding employment, there are a range of other military, government and community resources that impact the lives of service members, veterans and their families as they connect to employment and advance their careers. This includes institutions of higher education, programs focused on entrepreneurship, trade associations and others.





## WHO ARE THE EMPLOYERS?

When looking at Arizona employers, it is vitally important to consider the size of each employer, as approaches and efforts to hire military-affiliated job seekers will vary based on size, resources and industry. Here is a simple breakdown of what designates an employer's size:

As of 2010, businesses with fewer than 500 employees represented 97% of employers in Arizona and employed 45% of the private-sector labor force.

— U.S. Small Business Administration

**Microbusiness:**  
1–5 employees



**Small Business:**  
6–49 employees



**Medium Business:**  
50–499 employees



**Large Business:**  
500+ employees



The Arizona Commerce Authority is focused on recruiting, growing, and creating businesses in these key sectors:



**Aerospace & Defense**



**Technology & Innovation**



**Renewable Energy**



**Bioscience & Health Care**



**Optics/Photonics**



**Advanced Manufacturing**



**Advanced Business Services**



## ISSUES EXPRESSED BY JOB SEEKERS



**“It’s not just about finding a job; it’s about celebrating a new phase of civilian life and enjoying all that we have been fighting for.”**

— Job Seeker, Arizona Roadmap Survey

**35%** of employed survey respondents consider themselves underemployed.  
**32%** did not access any employment service provider programs.



## ISSUES EXPRESSED BY EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS



“There is a huge disconnect between the military transition and workforce systems. There are also many programs out there to serve vets that are not working together resulting in duplicative services.”

— Employment Service Provider, *Arizona Roadmap Survey*





## ISSUES EXPRESSED BY EMPLOYERS



**“We have had several veterans in our employ and have always found them loyal, hardworking, and knowledgeable...they make good leaders within our company.”**

— Employer, Arizona Roadmap Survey



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JOB SEEKERS

The goal of this Roadmap is to strengthen opportunities for you to become employed and grow your career. These are a few things to keep in mind and focus on as you engage in your job search:

### **Know your potential**

Be clear on what you bring to an organization as a potential employee. Your military service and experiences are valuable and many employers believe there is great benefit to hiring someone with a military background or affiliation.

### **Focus on your job search**

Measure your expectations regarding the time, effort and energy that it takes to land a position. Know that the market is competitive and that finding a job fitting your experience and interests can take time. Think of your job search as your full-time job in itself and one that might require developing your skills in different areas, such as networking, interviewing and learning about specific companies you are interested in.

### **Manage the transition**

Consider what you can do to manage the challenges that may accompany this transition. This can include managing your expectations of the job search process and planning ahead while still in the military when possible.

### **Actively engage in available support resources**

Great efforts are being made to honor your service by providing support and assistance for the job search process, but it is your responsibility to take full advantage of what is available to you.

### **Consider alternative & targeted approaches to finding employment**

Traditional full-time employment is just one of the ways to enter the civilian workforce. Consider other opportunities, such as apprenticeships, internships, service learning or vocational training.

### **Next steps for Job Seekers**

1. Complete the job search checklist (available at the website below) to determine your next steps.
2. Connect with an employment support program (locations are available in every county statewide to assist with your job search).
3. Find supportive services to address areas such as housing, finances, family stress and physical health.

Learn more at [www.ArizonaCoalition.org/employment](http://www.ArizonaCoalition.org/employment) (navigate to the job seeker section).



## GUIDELINES FOR CARE FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS

The *Guidelines for CARE* for employment service providers to become a partner organization on the Military/Veteran Resource Network were developed for our community by our community with the input of service members, veterans, family members, partners, providers and stakeholders. Keep in mind that the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) and the Arizona Coalition for Military Families (ACMF) can provide training and technical assistance necessary to fulfill the list of requirements for each of these areas:

- **Connect** to the Culture
- **Ask** the Right Questions at the Right Time
- **Respond** Effectively
- **Engage** in the Military/Veteran Community

By becoming an Employment Service Provider partner organization, you will have access to a range of training, technical assistance and support, and have the opportunity to strengthen service delivery, coordination of care and connection to service members, veterans and their families.

### Next Steps for Employment Service Providers

1. Connect with ADVS/ACMF for orientation and any needed technical assistance.
2. Schedule any needed training.
3. Implement any needed policies/procedures.
4. Complete the application process to become a partner organization.
5. Build your organization profile and share best practices.

Learn more at [www.ArizonaCoalition.org/employment](http://www.ArizonaCoalition.org/employment) (navigate to the employment service provider section).



## **GUIDELINES FOR CARE FOR ARIZONA VETERAN SUPPORTIVE EMPLOYERS**

The Arizona Veteran Supportive Employer designation is based on Arizona's *Guidelines for CARE*, developed for our community by our community with the input of service members, veterans, family members, partners, providers and stakeholders. The Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) and the Arizona Coalition for Military Families (ACMF) can provide all the training and technical assistance necessary to fulfill the list of requirements for each of these areas:

- **Connect** to the Culture
- **Ask** the Right Questions at the Right Time
- **Respond** Effectively
- **Engage** in the Military/Veteran Community

By becoming an Arizona Veteran Supportive Employer, you will have access to a range of training, technical assistance and support, and have the opportunity to strengthen hiring and retention of military-affiliated employees.

### **Next Steps for Employers**

1. Connect with ADVS/ACMF for orientation and any needed technical assistance.
2. Schedule any needed training.
3. Implement any needed policies/procedures.
4. Complete the application process to become an Arizona Veteran Supportive Employer.
5. Build your organization profile and share best practices.

Learn more at [www.ArizonaCoalition.org/employment](http://www.ArizonaCoalition.org/employment) (navigate to the employer section).



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Everyone in our community can have an important role in strengthening support for service members, veterans and their family members:

- Extend support and encouragement to service members, veterans and their families wherever you encounter them (community, school, workplace, etc.).
- Sometimes just listening and sharing a resource is enough.
- Consider becoming a Military/Veteran Resource Navigator to learn how best to connect a person or family into the available network of services and resources.
- Encourage organizations you are connected to, whether through your employer, civic group, faith-based community or other organization, to get involved in strengthening support for Arizona's military, veteran and family population.

### Next Steps for Community Members

1. Keep key resources on hand to share with service members, veterans and family members when needed:



Access confidential help 24/7, by phone, chat and text  
[www.VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net)



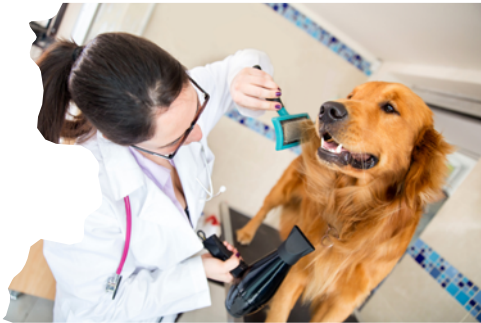
Connect to Arizona-specific resources and information  
[www.MilitaryVeteranResourceNetwork.org](http://www.MilitaryVeteranResourceNetwork.org)

2. Attend a Military/Veteran Resource Navigator training (find the schedule of upcoming trainings statewide at [www.ArizonaCoalition.org/events/navigator-training](http://www.ArizonaCoalition.org/events/navigator-training)).
3. Connect organizations you are affiliated with to the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services & Arizona Coalition for Military Families to become partner organizations.

Learn more about the Roadmap at [www.ArizonaCoalition.org/employment](http://www.ArizonaCoalition.org/employment).

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GOVERNOR DOUGLAS A. DUCEY

# STATE OF ARIZONA

# PROCLAMATION

**WHEREAS**, the State of Arizona is home to over 600,000 service members, veterans, and their families who live throughout our state; and

**WHEREAS**, these individuals and their families bring valuable skills, knowledge, experience, and leadership to our civilian workplaces; and

**WHEREAS**, military, government, and community employment service providers work to connect service members, veterans, and their family members with employment opportunities; and

**WHEREAS**, public and private sector organizations seek to strengthen the recruiting, hiring, retention, and promotion of military-affiliated employees by being Arizona Veteran Supportive Employers; and

**WHEREAS**, key stakeholders from the public and private sector have come together to elevate the Arizona Roadmap to Veteran Employment to focus on veteran careers, facilitated by the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services and the Arizona Coalition for Military Families; and

**WHEREAS**, the hiring and retention of military-affiliated employees contributes to a strong workforce and economy throughout the State of Arizona.

**NOW, THEREFORE**, I, Douglas A. Ducey, Governor of the State of Arizona do hereby proclaim November 2017 – November 2018, as

## ARIZONA VETERAN CAREER YEAR



IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of the State of Arizona

*Douglas A. Ducey*  
GOVERNOR

DONE at the Capitol in Phoenix on this thirty-first day of October in the year Two Thousand and Seventeen and of the Independence of the United States of America the Two Hundred and Forty-Second.

ATTEST:

*Michelle Reagan*

SECRETARY OF STATE



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WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0307

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GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

March 9, 2021

Dear Arizona Veteran Supportive Employer:

Congratulations on today's recognition for your dedication and commitment to train, hire, and retain Arizona's servicemembers, veterans, and their families!

Your efforts as a BeConnected partner and Arizona Veteran Supportive Employer (AVSE) to create an inclusive, reliable workforce for servicemembers, veterans, and their families has a positive impact on our communities. Please extend my best wishes to your devoted staff for their commitment to support the professional and career development of Arizona's veterans and my gratitude for their dedication and continued support of your mission.

As the senior Senator for Arizona and a member of the United States Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, I work to ensure that Arizona servicemembers, veterans, and their families receive the benefits and care they earned and deserve. Improving access to employment is a critical component of that care. Today's recognition signifies your commitment to our nation's servicemembers and veterans, and for that, you should be very proud.

It is my honor to be a voice for our veterans in the United States Senate, and I look forward to working with leaders like you to create a stronger Arizona. If there is anything my team can do to be of assistance to you in the future, please do not hesitate to reach out to my Director of Military and Veteran Outreach, Ms. Kelly Mills, at [Kelly\\_Mills@sinema.senate.gov](mailto:Kelly_Mills@sinema.senate.gov).

Congratulations again on this wonderful accomplishment.

Sincerely,

Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator

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**FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF THOMAS@ARIZONACOALITION.ORG**

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From the Phoenix Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/news/2021/04/30/hiring-military-veterans-helps-arizona-economy.html>

My View

## **My View: Hiring veterans, military family members makes Arizona's economy stronger**

Apr 30, 2021, 5:00am MST

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Every two years, the Arizona Coalition for Military Families issues a survey to learn more about the needs of our state's veterans. In 2019, we heard loud and clear that Arizona's veterans and their families were concerned about the future of their jobs and how they wanted clearer paths to financial stability through meaningful employment and career progression.

We heard from veterans, who are trained to continuously pursue their personal best while in the military, that they want more training and career development opportunities. As a result of this survey, the coalition developed several initiatives in our "Be Connected Ecosystem of Support" to resolve barriers to employment and career progression.

Recently, we gathered virtually to celebrate the progress we have with Arizona's Veteran Supportive Employers (AVSE) around the state who commit to hiring those who have served our country. These organizations come from all sectors of our state's economy and representing employers of all sizes, from the Fortune 500 to startups.

These employers are living their values by earning the designation of an AVSE. They have completed specific training on what it means in their day-to-day operations to support veterans and their families – from creating policy to supporting the development of employee resource groups. The designation also signifies to the military and veteran affiliated job seeker that the employer is committed to being an inclusive workplace that appreciates the experiences and skillsets they can add to their workforce while caring for the well being and success of their whole family. This designation gives these employers an edge in recruitment by cultivating a pipeline of candidates that bring with them valuable skills and experience gained from their military experiences.

While there is much more to do to ensure every Arizona veteran and transitioning service members has access to meaningful employment opportunities, we took a moment to celebrate the successes that happened as a result of the aforementioned 2019 survey. Despite the dampening effects of the pandemic, we celebrated 29 employers who hired a total of 33 veterans, one spouse and provided 34 individuals transitioning out of military service opportunities to gain civilian work experience by hosting a SkillBridge apprenticeship. Sen. Kyrsten Sinema presented a letter to each employer, stating that their “effort as a Be Connected partner and Arizona Veteran Supportive Employer to create an inclusive, reliable workforce for service members, veterans, and their families has a positive impact on our communities.”

Right now, there are more than 500,000 service members and veterans living in Arizona. In federal fiscal year 2019, there were 2,176 active duty service members who transitioned out of military service in Arizona into the civilian workforce: 610 separations from Luke Air Force Base in Glendale; 902 at Davis Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson; and 664 at the Army's Fort Huachuca in Sierra Vista.

The Arizona Coalition for Military Families, with our partners at the Arizona Department of Veterans' Service, the Arizona Department of Economic Security and the Arizona Commerce Authority, are issuing a call to encourage all Arizona employers to capture this world-class, highly skilled talent. We want to send the message to

all who served that we would like them and their families to permanently remain in the Grand Canyon state.

Retaining transitioning service members and their families and developing the careers of the veterans and their family members makes Arizona's economy stronger and our workforce more diversified.

*Thomas Winkel is director of the Arizona Coalition for Military Families. To learn more, visit [www.ArizonaCoalition.org](http://www.ArizonaCoalition.org).*



## **How Congress can respond to Covid-19 Challenges on Veteran Workforce**

The following are recommendations for ways Congress can support services members, veterans and family members around employment, in light of COVID-19.

This information was prepared for the Arizona Coalition for Military Families by the **Arizona Commerce Authority** and the **Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)**, both partners in Arizona's veteran workforce initiatives.

### **Reducing Barriers to Workforce Participation**

**Adopt Universal Licensing** - With many veterans and military members frequently relocating, Arizona focused on reduced barriers into the workforce, such as Arizona's first-in-the-nation universal licensing law. This helps to mitigate unemployment and under-employment often experienced by military spouses as well.

Congress could provide benefit through review of unnecessary licensing barriers that keep families from realizing their full economic potential, especially as military families and veterans are reconsidering the idea of remote work.

**Digital Access** - As we continue to move deeper into the digital era, it is critical that veterans have access to broadband, equipment, and have the know-how to maneuver in a digital environment (digital literacy). This can help alleviate feelings of isolation and connect them with their support mechanisms.

In Arizona, Governor Doug Ducey launched a public-private partnership initiative to expand broadband access and provide mobile wireless hotspots to assist those in need, especially for families with children needing access to online learning. This sought to also help additional challenges existing for Veterans receiving benefits, looking for work or attending school during the pandemic. (Source: ADVS IT-Statewide Internet Access Challenges 11/25/2020)

Arizona is receiving national recognition for making permanent provisions to expand telehealth which was significantly expanded and implemented during the pandemic. (see [HERE](#) and [HERE](#)).

Congress can support efforts to ensure all services members, veterans, and military families have access to and the digital support needed to thrive and survive.

### **Expediting Skills & Credential Attainment**

As economic conditions improve, so does the need for middle skilled and high-skilled workers in the labor market. According to OEO, in 2018 occupations in Arizona requiring an associate degree are projected to record the fastest growth, growing 6.7% annually, and 61.5% of jobs require work-based training (short, moderate, or long-term on-the-job training).

**Work-based Training** - Opportunities such as SkillBridge, Apprenticeships, On-the-Job Training and Work-Experience programs offer great paid training opportunities for transitioning services members and emerging workforce policies are starting to swing in this direction.

Congress must support these programs with an employer-first mentality and reduce the reliance on the military's chain of command. This would allow for easier outreach and access to potential candidates.

**Transferable Skills** - Transitioning service members enter the civilian workforce with many foundational academic, technical, and professional skills acquired through their military service; making them ideal job candidates. However, there is a lack of comprehension of what those skills and credentials are and how they transfer to the civilian world.

In Arizona, the Arizona Career Readiness Program allows for veterans and transitioning service members a no-cost career readiness assessment that scores their foundational academic and professional skills.

Congress can support the streamlining of skills and credential articulation to aid academia (i.e. military skills for credit), workforce professionals and human resources to credit these experiences.

**Online Learning** - COVID expedited a wide acceptance of distance learning and online credential attainment, a benefit that has been embraced by the military.

Congress can continue to support online education opportunities, in conjunction with expanding Military Experiences for Academic Credit (mentioned above)

**Self-Employment** - While many Veteran-owned businesses were not assisted during COVID, causing some to go out of business, Arizona's Commerce Authority launched ongoing small business webinars to provide information on resources available, including assistance on accessing Recovery funds.

### **Increasing Direct Outreach and Coordinated Service Delivery**

Like many others, Veterans, Guardsmen, Reservists and their family members lost jobs or had to resign during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the US Department of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for Veterans was 9.6% (2020 average) and peaked in April 2020 at 11.7%.

(Source: US DOL Economic News Release, Employment status of Veterans 18 years and over by state, 2020 average)

During COVID, Governor Doug Ducey launched the Return Stronger Campaign, an Upskilling and Reskilling initiative targeted at dislocated workers. The campaign provided direct access to virtual workforce preparation resources. Over 9% of those participants identified as veteran (with 2.16% identified as Spanish speakers).

Arizona is bringing together key partners from state agencies representing veteran services, human services, workforce services, and economic development to develop a coordinated service delivery model to support veteran employment in Arizona.

Congress should provide resources to support state/local coordinated service delivery models to support veteran employment initiatives. This would help to amplify messaging around veteran employment preferences and incentives and direct engagement a talent matching with veterans and supportive employers.



## **COVID-19 & Career Navigation Vignettes**

An Air Force veteran was laid off from his position because of COVID-19. This veteran was in need of stable housing for his partner and young child, as well as a new job. Funds were provided for rental assistance and the veteran was connected to the Career Navigation program. As a result he was able to secure employment. He is very relieved and appreciative of our coordinated efforts in support of his family and new career opportunities!

A Hopi Army veteran and family of five were referred into the program due to hardship caused by COVID-19. He has lost wages due to reduction of hours, and the COVID relief fund was able to pay his auto payment and upgrade his propane tank to keep his family warm.

An Air Force veteran, who is currently a college student, was impacted by COVID-19 when the pandemic shortened the school semester. A reduction in the semester hours dramatically impacted the GI Bill monthly stipend he received for both December and January. As a result of the grant, our team was able to provide coverage of his December rent and cell phone bill. He was truly speechless over the support for his family!

A Navajo Marine Corps veteran lost employment in July 2020, followed by his wife falling ill with COVID-19. This veteran struggles with PTSD, and assistance was provided to him, his wife and two small children by covering auto insurance, a car payment and cell phone bill.

A 100%-disabled Army Special Forces veteran was in need of housing stability for his wife and three children after a reduction in job hours due to COVID-19. Funds were provided to help them maintain stable housing. When he found out that his family was approved for financial assistance, and that money was being sent to his landlord, he literally had a shout of happiness!

An Army veteran reached out to our program. His spouse was laid off from her position due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and his salary does not cover their needs. His spouse is currently seeking employment and has been introduced to the Career Navigation team for support. The fund was able to provide stability for this family, which includes a college-age son, by paying their utility bills.

A veteran who had previously worked with the Career Navigation team provided a great update to the team. He completed a SkillBridge placement. Although the employer did not have an open position to hire the veteran into upon completion of his SkillBridge placement, he worked so hard during his time with the company that they referred him to a private contractor. This private contractor offered him a position and the veteran is set to begin his new role in mid-March.

An individual wasn't finding much success in obtaining a job, despite her well-rounded knowledge in resume writing and other employment-related areas. She then decided to take Career Navigation training sessions and immediately found employment in her field of interest.



## COVID-19 & Career Navigation Vignettes

On top of being in a field that she considered to be at the top of her career interests, she was also given a high-end salary. She was extremely grateful and expressed her gratitude by saying, "I would not have gotten this job had it not been for the Career Navigation team."

A veteran was facing financial challenges and couldn't pay his bills. The Career Navigation team, who he was in initial contact with, linked him to the Be Connected support line. From there, the support line specialists were able to get him the resources he needed. This success story is special because the veteran identifies himself as someone who doesn't usually ask for help, quoted saying, "I don't usually ask for help. All those programs and resources that are out there are for other people." Thankfully, he gave Be Connected a chance to assist him and he was able to get the resources he needed. He was happy and grateful for the assistance and support and is now actively and regularly engaged with both the Be Connected and Career Navigation teams.

A veteran was having a hard time putting food on the table for her family. After getting connected with Be Connected, the team utilized the COVID Community Support Project to assist her by providing her with a gift card for a local grocery store. Because the veteran was able to feed herself and her family, she was now able to focus on her challenges regarding employment. She was extremely grateful for the Be Connected and Career Navigation teams and their resources.

A veteran was having a hard time finding employment after separating from the military, as he wasn't able to get an employment offer after multiple job interviews. The Career Navigation team had the opportunity to work with him. He was extremely happy to follow the process and practice what the Career Navigation training sessions taught. Immediately after completing the training sessions, the veteran was able to find meaningful employment in a field he highly desired with a high-level salary. "We give people assurances like 'Hey look, we will continue to work with you even after you separate from the military' because a lot of programs, they get dropped or people stop after they leave the military," said a Central Career Specialist with the Career Navigation team. "We continue to follow through...I call it the Aftercare Approach."

In April, a transitioning service member reached out to the Career Navigation team for assistance in regards to SkillBridge opportunities. During the early weeks of March and April, the service member had attended multiple training sessions, which included the Career Navigation Orientation. Further, throughout the months of May through September, the career seeker was given resume education and was connected to multiple Arizona Veteran Supportive Employers. In December, the career seeker informed the Career Navigation team that he was waiting on a formal offer letter.

In May, a transitioning service member reached out to the Career Navigation team for assistance in regards to SkillBridge opportunities. Throughout the months of June through



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August, the career seeker attended training sessions, including Career Navigation Orientation and worked closely with the team. In August, the career seeker stated that a SkillBridge placement had been obtained through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, as a Supervisory Management Analyst. The career seeker stated that the position would begin the following month. Throughout the duration of the SkillBridge, the career seeker was contacted by the Career Navigation team to ensure that the process and experience was optimal. In mid-January, the career seeker stated that two offers of employment were extended at the conclusion of the SkillBridge, one pertaining to the VA and another with the Arizona Air National Guard. The career seeker chose the latter, accepting a position as a medical officer that will begin at the conclusion of her service contract.

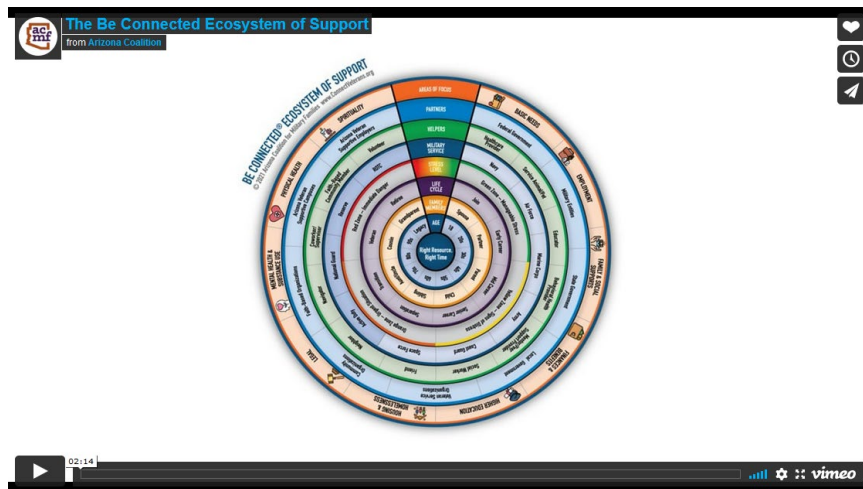
In October, a transitioning service member reached out to the Career Navigation team for assistance in regards to SkillBridge opportunities. During the early weeks of October, the service member had attended various training sessions (Career Connections, Career Navigation Orientation and Career Readiness, formerly known as the Resume Webinar). The following month, the employer engagement team reached out to an Arizona Veteran Supportive Employer and connected the career seeker's resume to the employer through a direct hiring contact. Within a few days, the employer sent correspondence to the employer engagement team stating that they would like to move forward with the SkillBridge opportunity for this particular service member. From that point forward, the service member was guided by the Career Navigation team to complete necessary preparation, including job-related assessments. The service member began the SkillBridge opportunity with the employer.



## Arizona Veteran Workforce Support Video Links:



Arizona SkillBridge program overview: <https://vimeo.com/257536644>



Be Connected Ecosystem of Support: <https://vimeo.com/538524444>