

Commonwealth of Massachusetts



Strategic Plan to Increase Employment Opportunities for Veterans

Report of the Interagency Taskforce on Veterans Employment

March 8, 2013

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Introduction

The Commonwealth has a proud history, and leads the nation in providing benefits and services to our returning Veterans. Of the Commonwealth's Executive Branch workforce, approximately 5.4% are self-identified Veterans. Vietnam Era Veterans represent 1.3% of the overall population.

However, as a result of the U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan winding down, there is a rising number of Veterans entering the job market. The unemployment rate for younger veterans, ages 18-24, exceeds the national unemployment rate, currently 7.7% according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows a general trend in the unemployment rate for veterans exceeding the unemployment rate for non-veterans. For our younger veterans, ages 18-24 this trend is even greater. The high percentage of unemployment amongst younger Veterans is due partly to stereotyping Veterans' fitness for employment, such as inadequate technology skills and lack of education. Additionally, a number of older veterans have acquired new skills and are transitioning from college into second careers. While employers value military service, most will admit that they experienced some challenges in translating military experience and skills to civilian jobs.

Research has shown that many of our returning Veterans are well skilled, and have matriculated in four year institutions of higher learning or have attended community colleges. This classroom experience coupled with the hands on leadership experience they gained as a result of being in the military and operating in real world situations make these individuals well equipped to enter the job market. They are trained to lead by example and to respect process and procedures, while also demonstrating ingenuity and resourcefulness in problem solving. They can enhance our workplace with greater diversity and global perspective on our efforts.

The first challenge faced by the Commonwealth is equipping our hiring managers with the tools they need to properly assess and translate military experience into civilian terms. Second, our workforce must be prepared to create a welcoming environment for our Veterans to return to and be productive contributors. Addressing the employment concerns of returning Veterans is of the utmost importance to the Patrick-Murray Administration.

The Administration launched an aggressive and far reaching Veteran's employment initiative that is aimed at providing assistance and mechanisms for getting more veterans to work in Massachusetts.

Background

The Governor and Lieutenant Governor called for the establishment of an Interagency Taskforce on Hiring Veterans. The taskforce will balance our non-discrimination, equal opportunity and diversity efforts pursuant to Executive Order 526 and our current efforts to be a Model Employer of Persons with Disabilities. The Secretary of Administration and Finance and the Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Services were charged with this responsibility. As a result, the Interagency Veterans Taskforce on Employment was launched in March 2012. Secretary Gonzalez charged the head of the Human Resources Division along with Taskforce members to take a critical look at the Executive Branch's current policies, processes and practices on hiring Veterans and to think creatively and boldly in offering recommendations around three critical goals:

- I. Identifying and removing barriers to employment for Veterans in an effort to increase employment within each Secretariat;
- II. Increasing the level of awareness of hiring managers about the value and benefits of hiring Veterans; and
- III. Designing a tracking system to track the Commonwealth's progress from year to year on employment initiatives resulting from this taskforce.

The recommendations outlined in this strategic plan reflect the thinking of the Taskforce members about these critical goals and how the Executive Branch can move forward implementing them. Our

strategic approach is centered on five comprehensive areas:

1. Leadership Commitment
2. Compatible and Complimentary Efforts
3. Skills Development and Employment
4. Marketing Veterans' Employment
5. Establishing an Information Gateway

Leadership Commitment – establishes a governance structure and infrastructure dedicated solely to the employment of Veterans in the Executive Branch;

Compatible and Complimentary Efforts – forces a focus on existing diversity and inclusion efforts as outlined pursuant to Executive Order 526 such that these Veterans' efforts are compatible to and complimentary of existing efforts;

Skills Development and Employment – focuses on providing employment counseling and aligning the talents and aspirations of Veterans with civil service career and management opportunities;

Marketing Veterans' Employment – creates a marketing campaign targeted to Veterans on the benefits of continuing their careers in public service within the Executive Branch, and to hiring officials on how Veterans can meet skills demands in their organizations and;

Information Gateway – creates a single-source website for disseminating accurate and consistent Veteran employment information and resources for Veterans, human resources (HR) professionals, and hiring officials.

An initiative of this magnitude is a great challenge. It requires a strategic approach and a shared vision. But, most important, it requires leadership support and agency participation to make it happen.

Our Vision

The Executive Branch will become a Model Employer of Veterans

The Vision Statement embodies our key guiding principles:

- We have top leadership support and accountability for the recruitment, employment, development and retention of Veterans in the Executive Branch;
- We are committed to Veterans by administering Veterans' Preference programs fully and accurately;
- We work to mitigate barriers to employment for Veterans';
- We value Veterans for their commitment to public service, skills, and dedication;

- We will align efforts to employ Veterans with a disability to our Model Employer of Persons with Disability efforts; and

We identify and promote excellence throughout Government in the recruitment, on-boarding, development, and retention of Veterans.

Mission:

- Eliminate policy and process barriers that impede Veterans from effectively competing for employment opportunities in the Executive Branch.
- Increase the employment of Veterans in the Executive Branch.

Strategic Goals

The strategies in this plan are designed to help agencies take a comprehensive and collaborative approach to Veterans' employment in the Executive Branch. By leveraging capacity and resources of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, the Department of Veterans Services and the Human Resources Division, each Executive Branch agency will be better positioned to increase the number of Veterans coming into its workforce and to utilize their talents to achieve its mission.

I. Identify and remove barriers to employment for Veterans in an effort to increase the number of Veterans employed in the Executive Branch.

We identified five key barriers to increasing the number of Veterans employed in the Executive Branch:

- Lack of clear directives regarding the value and importance of hiring Veterans;
- Existing infrastructure does not support advocacy of Veterans' employment within Executive Branch agencies;
- Insufficient professional development opportunities to further understand Veterans' preference and utilization of special hiring authorities by HR professionals and hiring officials;
- Inadequate understanding of Veterans' preference and the Executive Branch hiring process by our Veterans and transitioning service members and;
- Absence of a concrete system to match Veterans' skills and education to positions

within the Executive Branch.

A. Ensure agency leaders understand and advocate the value and importance of hiring Veterans in the Executive Branch.

Our agency leaders will advocate for the employment of Veterans, understanding the sacrifices our Veterans have made in protecting our country. To achieve this goal, the following action steps will be completed:

1. Create a governance structure within the Executive Branch to provide leadership and accountability for Veterans' employment by:
 - i. Establishing an Interagency Task Force on Veteran Employment;
 - ii. Directing that the Interagency Taskforce on Veteran Employment bring forward policy and process recommendations to improve our ability to identify Veterans who can contribute meaningfully to attainment of agency missions and objectives;
 - iii. Implement Interagency Taskforce recommendations as expeditiously as possible to (a) eliminate systematic barriers that confront Veterans, and (b) improve Veterans' hiring outcomes;
 - iv. Developing and implementing Government-wide Veterans' Recruitment and Employment Strategic Plan; and
 - v. Providing an annual report to the Secretary for Administration and Finance, the Secretary of Veteran Services' and the Chief Human Resources Officer on the progress of the Veterans' employment effort.

B. Ensure our Veterans' efforts are compatible to and complimentary of existing diversity and inclusion efforts.

We are presently committed to recruiting, hiring and retaining an Executive Branch workforce that reflects the diversity of the Commonwealth. These efforts proceed under Executive Order 526. As we launch an effort to achieve our objectives relative to Veterans, we should build on our existing diversity efforts.

1. Utilize the Executive Order 526 Guidelines and the Commonwealth as a Model Employer of Persons with Disabilities effort to develop and/or refine administrative efforts to achieve our Veterans' efforts mission objectives.

C. Align Veterans' and transitioning service members' skills and career aspirations to Executive Branch opportunities.

The Executive Branch has a very diverse workforce; one that reflects the diversity of the Commonwealth. The range of employment opportunities within the Executive Branch is broad. A key element of our work is to align Veterans with these employment opportunities. Through skills developed during service and from additional training and education received through other means, Veterans are excellent candidates to fill positions in Executive Branch agencies.

D. Ensure Executive Branch agencies view Veterans' skills and dedication as essential in meeting mission objectives.

Military Veterans have developed key leadership and technological skills and have developed a strong sense of public service. It is critical we aggressively market the Executive Branch as a place Veterans can continue serving while realizing their career aspirations. At the same time, we will ensure hiring officials are keenly aware of Veterans' skills and attributes and view them as essential in meeting agency missions and objectives. Action steps include:

1. Promote Veterans and their employment in an Executive Branch-wide marketing campaign.

E. Ensure Veterans and hiring managers receive accurate and consistent information regarding Veterans' employment.

State law provides a boost to Veterans' efforts to obtain employment. [Pursuant to Civil Service Laws, veterans are entitled to a veteran's preference on eligibility lists for official service positions in which a civil service exam is administered and a passing score is achieved. Veterans may be afforded preference on the list for labor service positions. In addition, veterans may receive a hiring preference for provisional appointments where the veteran is deemed to be qualified for the position. See: MGL c. 31 § 26 and PAR 14.2.]. Additionally, we have an interest in accurately reflecting the presence of Veterans within our workforce. We must ensure that Human Resource Personnel and Hiring Managers are aware of state law, administration policies and administrative guidance relative to both. To do so, we will:

1. Ensure HR Professionals and Hiring Managers are well-versed on Veterans' preference programs and other administrative policy and guidance relative to Veterans.

II. Increase the level of awareness of hiring managers about the value and benefits of hiring Veterans.

In the effort to recruit more Veterans, we have researched the best practices in the public and private sectors and determined the best strategies for our success. Managers are a key component to our success and as such we must ensure they have a heightened awareness of the value Veterans bring to the workplace. By equipping our managers with the appropriate tools, we facilitate their ability to bring the best talent into our workforce.

A. Develop Best Practices and provide an approach for the Outreach and Recruitment of Veterans.

Action steps include:

1. Survey One Stop Career Center Veteran Services Representatives, Disabled Veteran Representatives and Community Colleges and College Career Placement Offices
 - i. Analyze data to determine best approach to reaching Veterans currently seeking employment in civilian jobs
2. Utilize State Employees testimonials as recruitment tool
 - i. Solicit support from the current state employee-Veteran community

(management/non-management) to share their employment experiences via a video, which will highlight the challenges of transitioning to civilian workforce as well as tips for transitioning; in an effort to build bridges of support.

B. Host a statewide Career Fair for Veterans through collaboration across Executive Branch agencies, Higher Education, Quasi-Public Agencies, Trial Courts, Massachusetts National Guard and other interested parties.

1. Establish link from the Commonwealth Employment Opportunities (CEO) website to MassVetAdvisor.org. MassVetsAdvisor.org is a tool to assist veterans and their families with finding benefits and services. It is vital that the Commonwealth be included as a prominent opportunity for employment. Therefore, MassVetAdvisor.org includes the link to the CEO website under employment opportunities. In addition, we should identify and create relationships with community colleges, colleges and universities to increase avenues for recruitment of Veterans and;
2. Create Veteran Liaisons in each agency by aligning the work of Agency Diversity Officers such that they inherit responsibility for promoting Veterans' recruitment, employment, and retention of Veterans in their agencies.

C. Develop tools that will assist HR Professionals and Hiring Managers during the hiring process.

Action steps include the development of the following materials for HR professionals and hiring managers:

1. Develop a Military Primer (general information about Military)
2. Develop a Military Glossary (common Military terminology)
3. Develop a Crosswalk (translation of Military jobs to civilian jobs)
4. Standardize Lead Sheet for hiring process
 - i. Design a job aid for HR/CMS Knowledge Center
 - ii. Update New Hires Check list (managers handbook)

D. Develop training for HR Professionals and Hiring Managers to enhance skills in on-boarding Veterans.

Action steps include:

1. Modify "Battlemind" or other military cultural awareness training into Seminar for HR Professionals and Hiring Managers. "Battle-mind" training illustrates some of the challenges veterans may face when returning from combat deployments.
2. Enhance Commonwealth Management Certificate Program and Commonwealth Supervisors Certificate Program's HR Day, Diversity Training Part I for managers to include a focus on Veterans via the video testimonials.
3. Incorporate into the Manager's Mental Health training curriculum a component on Veterans with a focus on Post-Traumatic Stress and Traumatic Brain Injuries.

E. Launch a Self-identification Marketing Campaign

Action steps include:

1. Design self-identification form for Veterans.
2. Prepare a set of Frequently Asked Questions.
3. Secure consultants to design an Executive Branch wide self-identification marketing campaign.

III. Establish baseline data and develop a tracking system to measure the Commonwealth's progress from year to year on the employment of Veterans.

Key to the success of any initiative is the ability to track and measure progress. It is vitally important that we establish indicators for success, but we must also ensure that everyone is starting from the same reference point. To this end, we will:

- A.** Establish a common definition of Veteran.
- B.** Gather and validate the current population of Veterans in Executive Branch in order to establish baseline data.
- C.** Work with ITD and HR/CMS team to condense and expand military dropdown selections in HR/CMS to better reflect Veterans in our workforce.
- D.** Collaborate with ITD to refine methods of collecting and extracting data from HR/CMS to ensure our ability to successfully track and measure progress.
- E.** Incorporate Veterans goals in our Diversity Plans.

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