

# Attracting and Retaining Transitioning Military and Their Families



This report was prepared for the Office of the Missouri Military Advocate and KBS Group

June 2022 | Dr. Mark C. White

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## Executive summary

Veterans make important contributions to the state’s workforce because they possess leadership experience, the capacity to work in teams and organizations, and the ability to learn new processes and procedures. Missouri aspires to be one of the nation’s leading destinations for the service men and women who transition out of the military every year. The state offers a competitive set of benefits, opportunities, and support services for veterans and their families, but there are always opportunities to strengthen the state’s competitive position.

Based on interviews with nearly 30 people from a wide variety of states and military communities, this report examines steps that other states and communities have taken to attract and retain transitioning military and their families. The experiences of other states provide opportunities to identify other ways to make Missouri an even more attractive place for them to begin their civilian lives. The report covers three broad issue areas:

1. Many states aspire to create a competitive **‘product’**, or set of benefits, programs, and support services to attract and retain veterans, transitioning military, and their families.
  - Similar to many other states, Missouri offers tax exemptions for military retirements and survivor benefits—one of the most important financial considerations for veterans. Many states, including Missouri, have also placed greater priority on credential portability for military spouses. Recognizing professional licenses awarded in other states (often in fields such as social work or healthcare) or waiving expensive recertifying fees can allow military spouses to enter the workforce more quickly after they relocate.
  - Available career opportunities can determine the location decisions of transitioning service members. Beyond basic services like resume coaching, some states (e.g., Indiana) have organizations give transitioning military ‘side doors’ into companies seeking military talent. Other places (e.g., Hampton Roads) developed labor market information tools that more efficiently identify the available job opportunities that seek military skills and experience.
  - States like Texas and Wisconsin have ‘State G.I. Bills’ that encourage service members to return home following their discharge. Several states (notably Kansas) are expanding—and bringing greater clarity to—opportunities for awarding college credit for past military learning. These efforts enable service members to better maximize the value of their military service.
  - Military spouses play critical roles in deciding where their families will settle into their civilian life. Their experiences in different military communities (i.e., employment opportunities, school quality, social networks, etc.) can shape their impression of those places and influence military family retention efforts. As a result, states like Alabama and communities like San Antonio have developed tools and programs to better support military spouses.
2. Successful states develop a compelling **‘message’** about why they are an attractive place for transitioning military and their families to begin their civilian life, as well as raise awareness about the benefits and services they offer.
  - States like Indiana and Wisconsin actively market themselves as destinations for military families by attending on-base hiring events. These events allow representatives from the state to

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directly connect with service members and sell the state as an attractive place for them to live, work and learn when they leave the service.

- Wisconsin developed a series of marketing materials that speak to the diversity within the military community and create messages that speak to an array of audiences (e.g., young or older veterans, spouses, etc.).
  - There is a continuous need for states, communities, non-profits and education providers to actively promote military-related benefits, programs and support services. Given the volume of information that transitioning military personnel receive during the transition process, identifying the most critical information for their circumstances can prove challenging.
3. Many of the benefits, services and marketing efforts used to attract and retaining transitioning military are transactional in nature, in that they often involve direct interaction with veterans, transitioning military and their families. Many states take additional steps, that are not always directly apparent to transitioning service member, but nevertheless create a more ***‘military-friendly environment’*** within the state.
- Most employers recognize the value of hiring veterans, but they sometime lack the knowledge about how to actively recruit, hire and retain veterans, transitioning military and their spouses. [Virginia Values Veterans](#) (V3) and [North Carolina for Military Employment](#) (NC4ME) represents two state programs that prepare employers to become more veteran-friendly.
  - Post-secondary institutions can improve the environment for military-connected students by highlighting relevant benefits and support services. Iowa’s [Certified Higher Academic Military Partners](#) (CHAMPs) program allows institutions to earn a military-friendly designation by demonstrating how the college or university supports its military-connected students. This designation can help military-connected students make better choices about which institution will best meet their needs.
  - Creating greater support for military spouses is a critical aspect for creating a more military-friendly environment. Developing resources (e.g., Alabama’s Mentorship-HUB) or establishing programs like the U.S. Chamber Foundation’s Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zones can lead to better conditions for military spouses and families, which in turn can encourage them to stay in—or return to—that state.

Missouri can learn much from the experiences of other states in order to continue building its reputation as a good place for veterans and their families. An expansive range of benefits and programs can help, but these programs must also be effective. Therefore, future programs and benefits should also include regular evaluation and assessment to determine their overall impact.

Throughout the transition process there is no shortage of available information or people willing to, for instance, connect transitioning military to jobs or educational opportunities. This volume of information can lead some service members to feel as if they are ‘Drowning in a Sea of Good Will’. States should aspire to position themselves as the ‘Lighthouse in the Sea of Goodwill’, so that they can help transitioning service members and their families address their most pressing concerns in a quick and effective manner.

## Introduction

Approximately 142,000 veterans work in Missouri, representing 5% of the state’s civilian labor force.<sup>1</sup> Veterans make important contributions to the state’s workforce because they possess leadership experience, the capacity to work in teams and organizations, and the ability to learn new processes and procedures. Military spouses—who often possess post-secondary educations, are adaptable, and bring a wide array of work experiences—can further support and strengthen the state’s workforce. As a result, these trained and trainable workers possess many of the hard and soft skills that employers seek and can help backfill the state’s aging workforce.

Many active-duty military personnel cycle through Missouri’s military bases, most notably Fort Leonard Wood and Whiteman Air Force Base. The Missouri National Guard also draws guardsmen and guardswomen from throughout the state and has facilities such as Rosecrans Air National Guard Base in St. Joseph and Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis County. Additionally, there are large active-duty military installations—Scott Air Force Base and Ft. Leavenworth—located just across the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers in Illinois and Kansas, respectively. Beyond these installations, Missouri is also home to the Department of Defense’s (DoD) National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA)<sup>2</sup> and large defense contractors such as Boeing, Honeywell, Express Scripts and DRS Sustainment Systems.<sup>3</sup> These DoD and the private sector employers could better meet their labor needs if service members transitioning out of the military elected to remain in, or move to, Missouri.

Between FY 2014 and FY 2018, an average of 5,750 service members discharged annually to Missouri at the end of their service.<sup>4</sup> These transitioning service members and their families represent a real opportunity to strengthen the state’s workforce. A 2018 survey of Missouri-based military service members and their spouses showed that the three most important factors for choosing a post-military location were 1) employment opportunities, 2) proximity to family, and 3) cost of living.<sup>5</sup> Missouri has taken several steps (e.g., tax free military retirements, greater credential portability, new apprenticeship opportunities, etc.) to position itself as an attractive place for transitioning service members and their families to live, work and learn.

Promoting these advantages and opportunities is not a simple task. The factors influencing these location decisions vary by the age and experience of the service member, as well as their family priorities. Their experiences while stationed in Missouri can further shape their impressions of the state. For many service members, these decisions are often made in the 12-to-18 month window where service members work through the transition process. In order to attract and retain these potential new

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<sup>1</sup> 2016-2020 American Community Survey, Table S2101.

<sup>2</sup> White, M. 2020. ‘Using Real-Time Labor Market Information to examine the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency’s staffing needs in St. Louis’, prepared for the Sinquefeld Center for Applied Economic Research, Saint Louis University.

<sup>3</sup> White, M. ‘Federal Contracting Trends in Missouri’, University of Missouri Extension, February 2021. Available at: <https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/mx53>

<sup>4</sup> <https://skillbridge.osd.mil/>

<sup>5</sup> Huffman, J., Kiger, A, and Stockdale, C. 2018. ‘A Comprehensive Analysis of Missouri’s Efforts to Improve the Quality of Life of Military Servicemembers and Their Families’, prepared by the University of Central Missouri for the Office of the Missouri Military Advocate. Available at: <https://military.ded.mo.gov/media/mmpec-report/comprehensive-analysis-missouris-efforts-improve-quality-life-service-members>

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residents, states must tell service members and their families a compelling story about why they are an attractive destination. Moreover, this needs to occur during that transition window and before they have made their decision.

The Office of the Missouri Military Advocate's (MMA) has committed to make Missouri the nation's leading destination for transitioning military and their families looking to begin their civilian lives and careers. This goal is shared by others, as for instance, the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry's *Workforce 2030* strategy identified the need to create a statewide campaign to encourage U.S. Armed Forces veterans to locate in Missouri as a potential strategy for strengthening the state's workforce.<sup>6</sup> That said, Missouri is not the only state with this ambitious goal and it can learn much from the other states actively working to attract transitioning military and their families. Other previously commissioned reports show that no one state has all the answers. Relative to other states Missouri also remains relatively well positioned as a destination for transitioning military and their families. These earlier reports also note several ongoing challenges, not the least of which was an overall need for much greater awareness of available programs and resources.<sup>7</sup>

### **About this report**

This report examines steps that other states and communities have taken to attract and retain transitioning military and their families. It is not a comprehensive list of practices, but rather highlights how other places addressed many similar issues and challenges. The experiences of other states can show Missouri how to potentially strengthen and improve its programs and offerings. Interviews with nearly 30 people from a wide variety of states and military communities inform this report. To understand the range of programs and efforts, the research looked at attraction and retention practices from states with a large military footprint (e.g., North Carolina, Washington State), as well as places without significant active-duty facilities (e.g., Iowa, Wisconsin). Additional interviews were conducted with representatives from the State of Missouri and its military communities.

The report covers three broad issues. It begins by examining 'the product', or essentially the types of benefits, opportunities, and services that use to support and attract veterans, transitioning military, and their families. It then considers how states promote themselves as destinations for veterans and transitioning military and customize that message to different audiences (e.g., young or older veterans, spouses, etc.). Next, it looks at the efforts made to create more military-friendly places that are attractive to transitioning military. Finally, the report concludes with recommendations for maintaining and strengthening Missouri's future attractiveness to these groups.

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<sup>6</sup> Abernathy, E. and Payne, G. 2018. *Workforce 2030: A Call to Action*. Prepared by Economic Leadership, LLC for the Missouri Chamber Foundation.

<sup>7</sup> Huffman, J., Kiger, A, and Stockdale, C. 2018. 'A National Analysis of Efforts to Improve the Quality of Life of Military Servicemembers and Their Families with Recommendations for Missouri Policymakers', prepared by the University of Central Missouri for the Office of the Missouri Military Advocate. Available at: <https://military.ded.mo.gov/media/mmpec-report/national-analysis-efforts-improve-quality-life-service-members-and-their>

## Making the state more attractive to the military community

A good product is critical for selling the state. Many transitioning service members and their families do not simply return to their original homes. Rather they have many options about where to begin their civilian life. As a result, they can elect to live in the place that offers the mix of benefits, educational and employment opportunities, and quality of life that best meets their needs and the family's needs. States that can deliver those benefits and opportunities can shape how the military and veteran community perceives those places, and that will determine their ability to compete for military talent.

## Targeted benefits and regulations can make states more attractive

States use financial, tax and regulatory benefits to attract, retain and improve the general quality of life for transitioning military and veterans. In 2018, the University of Central Missouri authored two reports that, 1) inventoried the benefits afforded to Missouri-based military service members, veterans and their families,<sup>8</sup> and 2) examined similar benefits that other states offer.<sup>9</sup> These benefits and support services (the latter of which will be discussed in greater detail later in the report) often fall into several broad categories.

For instance, states commonly offer tax exemptions for military retirements and survivor benefits (See Figure 1). Only two states (California and Vermont) provide no state tax exemptions for military retirement pay (MRP) or survivor benefit plans (SBP), 13 states have partially exemptions, and 36 fully exempt MRP and SBPs (9 of which have no state income tax).<sup>10</sup> These benefits often influence location decisions and are often a key input into “Best Place to Retire” rankings found in magazines such as *Military Officer* or *Kiplinger's Personal Finance*. As with the federal government, many states also have veteran hiring preferences for state government jobs. In addition, states commonly provide either free or discounted rates for things like hunting and fishing licenses or admissions to state parks. While these latter benefits are not going to drive decisions about where to live, they do signal that the state is veteran-friendly.

Another common regulatory benefit that states offer relates to credential portability for military spouses. Recognizing professional licenses awarded in other states (often in fields such as social work or healthcare) or waiving expensive recertifying fees—and doing so in a timely manner—can allow military spouses to enter the workforce more quickly after they have relocated. This not only reduces unemployment and underemployment among military spouses, but it also helps employers in military communities find qualified workers.

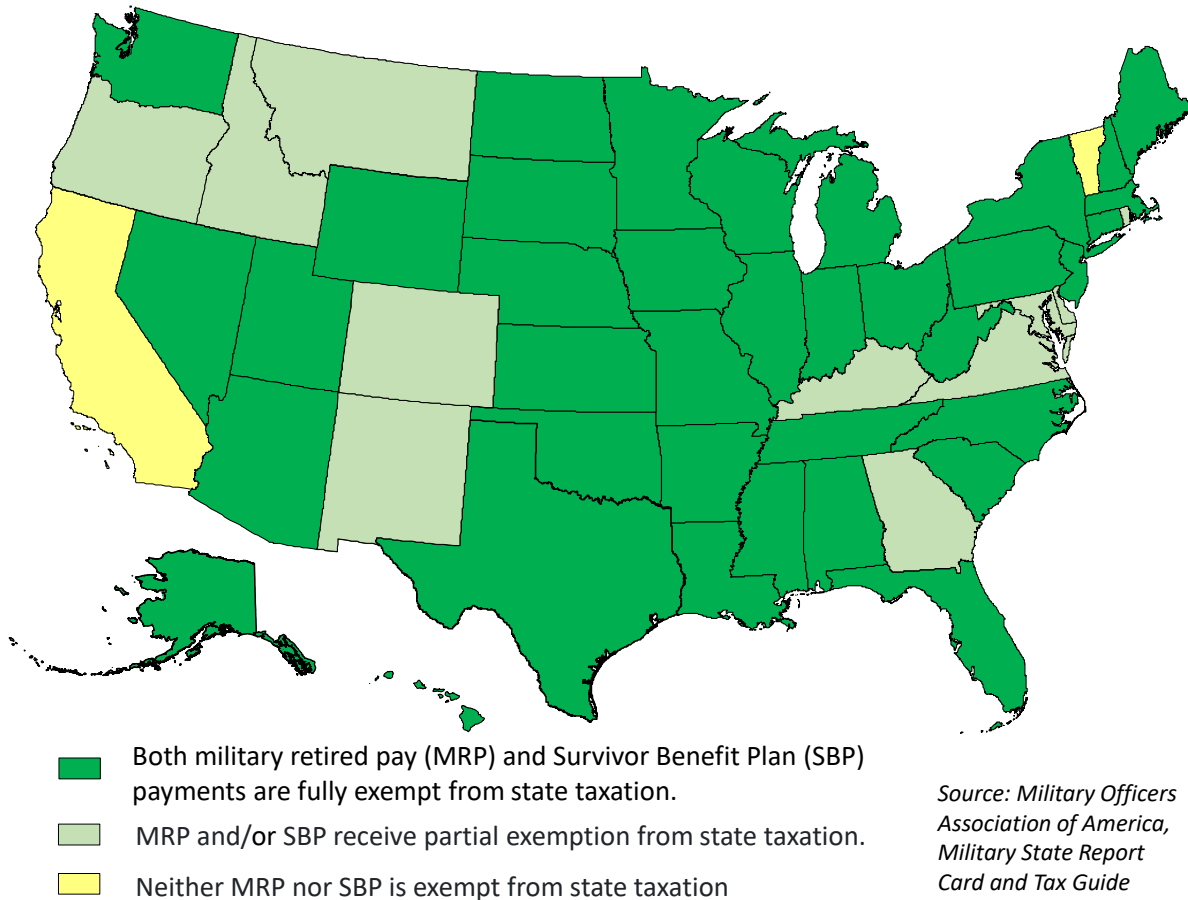
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<sup>8</sup> Huffman, J., Kiger, A, and Stockdale, C. 2018. ‘A Comprehensive Analysis of Missouri’s Efforts to Improve the Quality of Life of Military Servicemembers and Their Families’, prepared by the University of Central Missouri for the Office of the Missouri Military Advocate. Available at: <https://military.ded.mo.gov/media/mmpec-report/comprehensive-analysis-missouris-efforts-improve-quality-life-service-members>

<sup>9</sup> Huffman, J., Kiger, A, and Stockdale, C. 2018. ‘A National Analysis of Efforts to Improve the Quality of Life of Military Servicemembers and Their Families with Recommendations for Missouri Policymakers’, prepared by the University of Central Missouri for the Office of the Missouri Military Advocate. Available at: <https://military.ded.mo.gov/media/mmpec-report/national-analysis-efforts-improve-quality-life-service-members-and-their>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard/>

**Figure 1: State Tax Treatment for military retired pay and Survivor Benefit Plan payments**



Credential portability and license reciprocity is an important issue for many states. This includes Missouri, which in 2020 passed legislation allowing relocating military spouses to apply for occupational licenses in Missouri provided they held a valid certification from states with similarly or more stringent requirements. The recognition of professional licenses by other states can enable military spouses to work in their chosen profession, and this can lead to a more positive experience living in that state. Positive experiences increase the likelihood that a military family will stay or return to that state when their military life ends.

Washington State’s Military Transition and Readiness Council (WSMTC) identified credential portability as one of two priority issues (along with enhancing military spousal employment generally) and is taking steps to streamline the process.<sup>11</sup> Washington State already has designated staff in agencies like the Washington State Department of Health and Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, that help veterans and military spouses navigate and expedite the recertification process. However, there remains a lack of awareness about these services so there is an ongoing need to establish processes that

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.dva.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-02/WSMTC\\_StrategicPlan\\_2018\\_Recommendations.docx](https://www.dva.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-02/WSMTC_StrategicPlan_2018_Recommendations.docx)



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help military spouses better self-identify and gain access to these services.<sup>12</sup> Other states like Colorado and Texas have adopted provisions that allows military spouses to obtain temporary licenses—which enables them to directly enter the workforce—which affords them some time before they need to obtain that state’s equivalent license.<sup>13</sup>

While tax benefits and credential portability are two prominent benefits, states offer many other benefits to veterans, transitioning military and their families, and the availability of these benefits can help sell the state to potential new residents. Smaller benefits like free hunting and fishing licenses or reduced state park fees are also common and signal to veterans that the state values and offers multiple outdoor amenities and recreational opportunities. However, the extent to which any of these benefits sways individual location decisions varies by the person. Nevertheless, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation uses an inventory of these benefits in their marketing efforts to highlight Wisconsin compares to other states based on [26 different veteran benefits and programs](#).

In Missouri, the [Missouri Benefits and Resource Portal](#) for Veterans and Military is a clearinghouse for relevant information about all the benefits, incentives, and support services available to Missouri-based military, veterans, and their spouses. The 2018 UCM report showed that many of Missouri’s transitioning military and military families lack awareness about the nature and extent of these programs and benefits.<sup>14</sup> While this is an important resource, continuously promoting and highlighting these resources and benefits remains critical for selling the state.

Raising awareness about these benefits is not a challenge unique to Missouri. For example, Nebraska continues to build its portfolio of incentives and programs to make it more competitive with other states for attracting veterans. As a result, stakeholder groups like the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce are now actively promoting these benefits to local service members stationed at Offutt Air Force Base and the U.S. Strategic Command. In the future, they plan to highlight these benefits in efforts to market Omaha more broadly.

### **Building connections to meaningful career opportunities is essential**

State incentives and benefits may inform some location decisions, but the availability of meaningful civilian career opportunities strongly influences where transitioning military and their spouses choose to begin their civilian life. In many instances, they make seek to leverage the skills—hard and soft—developed while serving. There is no shortage of programs to help transitioning military find work. Initiatives like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s [Hiring Our Heroes](#) program organizes hiring events at military bases to connect transitioning military and their spouses with potential employers.

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<sup>12</sup> Washington State Military Transition and Readiness Council. 2019. ‘Military Spouse Listening Sessions Report’. Available at: [https://dva.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-02/MilSpouse\\_ListeningSessions\\_SummaryReport.pdf](https://dva.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-02/MilSpouse_ListeningSessions_SummaryReport.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Office of the Missouri Military Advocate. 2019. ‘An Examination of License Reciprocity for Military Spouses in the State of Missouri.’ Available at: <https://military.ded.mo.gov/media/mmpec-report/military-spouse-license-reciprocity-report>

<sup>14</sup> Huffman, J., Kiger, A, and Stockdale, C. 2018. ‘A Comprehensive Analysis of Missouri’s Efforts to Improve the Quality of Life of Military Servicemembers and Their Families’, prepared by the University of Central Missouri for the Office of the Missouri Military Advocate. Available at: <https://military.ded.mo.gov/media/mmpec-report/comprehensive-analysis-missouris-efforts-improve-quality-life-service-members>

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Moreover, the Department of Defense's [Skillbridge](#) program offers a more extensive opportunity for transitioning military to explore potential civilian careers. Through Skillbridge, transitioning military—within their last 180 days of service—can participate in specific industry training, apprenticeships or internships while still receiving their military pay and benefits.<sup>15</sup> This program allows active-duty military to explore and experience civilian careers and participating employers benefit by trying out potential future employees. However, states can help themselves by finding additional ways to connect transitioning military quickly and effectively to good paying jobs within their state. This section highlights some of the additional steps that can help move transitioning service members and their spouses into the civilian labor force.

### **Dedicated support services can bridge transitioning military to civilian careers**

The public workforce system provides priority services for veterans and military spouses. When jobseekers enter an [American Job Center](#) they answer a screening question about their connection to the military, and if they identify themselves as veterans or military spouses they are assigned to a dedicated staff member specifically trained to assist them. This assistance may include resume assistance, targeting specific types of employment opportunities, identifying relevant certification programs, and/or connecting them to relevant licensing bodies.

Several states provide additional 'concierge' services for transitioning military that express an interest in relocating to their state. Veteran attraction organizations such as Indiana's [INVets](#), [Mission Wisconsin](#) or Maine's [Boots2Roots](#)<sup>16</sup> connects transition military and their spouses to military-friendly employers that have available job opportunities that fits their skill set, background, and interests. Through these efforts, these organizations give these military and military-connected jobseekers a side door into these companies and prevent their resume from being lost in a larger pile of applications. Similarly, the State of Iowa's [Home Base Iowa](#) program—which seeks to connect transitioning military and veterans to Iowa-based opportunities—maintains a [database](#) listing currently available job opportunities at designated 'Home Base Iowa' (veteran-friendly) businesses. These concierge-style services ensure that transitioning military receive a warm handoff from the military to their civilian careers.

Some communities build physical facilities dedicated to support these activities. In Virginia's Hampton Roads region—where more than 15,000 service members transition out of the service annually—the local workforce development board (the Hampton Roads Workforce Council) established Veterans Employment Centers (VECs) to serve the region's transitioning service members (see Box 1 for more details). Veterans, transitioning military, and their spouses can meet counselors and employers in person at the VECs. The Hampton Roads Workforce Council also invested in the [Veterans Career Compass](#) that uses labor market information to help veterans and military spouses more efficiently identify potential civilian career opportunities. These efforts expedite the job seeking process by actively

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<sup>15</sup> Skillbridge opportunities do not necessarily need to be close to where the service members are stationed. However, participation does require the unit commander's permission and is therefore dependent on the requirements of the unit's mission.

<sup>16</sup> All three organization market their states to transitioning military and veterans, as well as provide additional transition support planning for the service members interested in relocating to their states upon leaving the military.

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### **Box 1: The Lighthouse in the Sea of Goodwill—Hampton Roads Veteran Employment Centers**

Transitioning service members are often inundated with information about opportunities, benefits and other services intended to help them successfully transition into civilian life. This flood of information and offers of help can lead transitioning service members to feel as though they are drowning in a 'sea of goodwill'. In Virginia's Hampton Roads region—where over 15,000 service men and women transition out of the military every year—the Hampton Roads Workforce Council's Veteran Employment Centers (VECs) aspire to be the lighthouse in this sea of goodwill. In partnership with the station commanders and the transition assistance program staff, and with some financial support from employers like Smithfield Foods, the VECs provide a physical space outside the fence line where service members can access help related to employment, education, entrepreneurship, benefits, or other social services.

Connecting transitioning military to jobs is one of the VEC's primary objectives. Among other things, the VECs provide access to the public workforce system and American Job Centers, and by extension resume development services, career workshops and computer access. Moreover, they allow veterans and transitioning military to directly connect with employers. Every Tuesday the VEC hosts [V3-certified employers](#) so that they can market their available career opportunities to military jobseekers. The VEC wants employers to be physically present because it demonstrates their commitment to hiring veterans. To further the placement process, the Hampton Roads Workforce Council developed the [Hampton Roads Veterans Career Compass](#). This tool considers these jobseekers' military experience and training and then identifies available jobs needing people with similar backgrounds. This labor market information tool helps with career counseling and can also make the placement process more efficient and effective.

Beyond employment services, the VECs also provide a venue to connect transitioning military and their spouses with other critical services. For instance, on the first Monday of every month veterans and transitioning service members meet with representatives from entrepreneurial-support programs like the Small Business Administration's Boots to Business program. On the first and third Thursday of every month, they can meet with educational providers so that they can meet with representatives from area post-secondary educational institutions, as well as learn about other educational opportunities like apprenticeships. The VEC also connects transitioning military and veterans with other support services (e.g., housing assistance) on the first and third Wednesday of every month.

The VECs have changed the way that the Hampton Roads region serves veterans, transitioning service members, and their families, by more effectively connecting them with employers and service providers. These connections allow them better sort through all the information they need to make decisions about their post-military life. Moreover, facilitating this warm handoff from the military to the civilian world increases the likelihood that these transition service members and their families will remain in the region, thereby strengthening the Hampton Roads workforce.

connecting veterans to interested employers and directing them to the critical information needed for them to complete the transition process.

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### **Entrepreneurial ventures offer additional career opportunities**

Finding employment is not the only option, as some transitioning service members may elect to create their own jobs through entrepreneurial ventures. Several programs exist to provide transitioning military and veterans with the information they need to start (or forego) businesses. For instance, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) funds 22 [Veteran Business Outreach Centers](#) (VBOCs) across the country.<sup>17</sup> VBOCs connect veterans to business planning services, entrepreneurial training, and mentorship. As part of the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program (TAP), they also deliver the '[Boots to Business](#)' program which covers some of the basics of business ownership. This program also includes follow-on support to service members, veterans, and spouses.

[Bunker Labs](#) represents another resource for veterans with entrepreneurial interests and aspirations. Whereas the VBOCs often focus on basic education and brokering connections to experts, Bunker Labs has its own programs, including the Veterans in Residence program which is a business incubator and its Ambassador Program that connects local Veteran and military spouse entrepreneurs with mentors to help them launch and grow businesses. Bunker Labs has locations in almost 40 cities across the country, including Kansas City.

### **Spousal employment opportunities are critical both during and after the period of service**

Securing *meaningful* employment for military spouses can make the difference between good and bad experiences in a military community. Too often military spouses have a hard time finding work, in part because employers do not understand their resumes; resumes that often show multiple short-term positions due to regular relocations. Despite this, military spouses often have relatively high levels of educational attainment and can prove adaptable due to their range of work experiences.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes initiative recently created a complementary [Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone](#) (MSEEZ) program that fosters collaboration between government, industry and area non-profits in order to develop local strategies that create better conditions and opportunities for military spouses.<sup>18</sup> Beyond encouraging and incentivizing greater hiring of military spouses, this program trains local hiring managers to better read and understand military spouses resumes. It also highlights ways to better onboard, connect and retain this potential workforce. San Antonio was one of the first communities to implement this program, and it has now been adopted in communities like the Hampton Roads (VA), San Diego, and Tampa, as well as states such as Georgia, North Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin, among others.

Military spouses may benefit from more flexible work, job sharing arrangements, and—particularly in the years since the pandemic—remote work opportunities. The growing use and acceptance of these work arrangements can allow some military spouses to remain in their jobs despite frequent relocations. To make this possible, however, communities must have adequate broadband access. Communities that fail to provide military spouses with meaningful employment opportunities are less likely to retain those

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<sup>17</sup> Missouri is served by the Veterans Business Resource Center ([www.vetbiz.com](http://www.vetbiz.com)) which has offices in St. Louis and Kansas City. In addition to Missouri, the VBRC also serves Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska.

<sup>18</sup> The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation provides a [Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone Playbook](#) to help participants understand the value of these efforts and guiding local leaders through the process.

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families when they transition into their civilian life. As a result, any job strategy that does not consider spousal employment is incomplete.

### **Box 2: Leveraging the mission to retain transitioning military—Grand Forks’ ‘Grand Sky’ Project**

As part of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process the Grand Forks Air Force Base lost its tanker mission causing the base’s employment numbers to shrink from 13,000 to 1,000 and leading to dramatic economic consequences. In the wake of these losses, North Dakota’s congressional delegation helped to secure a new mission centered around Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) and with this new mission the Grand Forks region sought to make the region not only ‘BRAC-Proof’, but also less dependent on the base.

In the years after BRAC, the region sought to find complementary elements that would support a new mission that would work both inside and outside of the gate at Grand Forks AFB. The University of North Dakota developed a 4-year Unmanned Aircraft Systems Operations, and with the help of federal stimulus funding, Northland Community and Technical College launched an aviation maintenance program focused on UAS. BRAC also reduced the Air Force’s physical space needs, so the region secured an unused part of the base, including a runway, repurposing it as the Grand Sky Industrial Park. This park, which received significant infrastructure investments from the state and the DoD’s Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation, is designed exclusively to host private sector UAS businesses. Combined these efforts—in concert with a great deal of regional collaboration—set a new trajectory for the region’s economic development.

In addition to creating new scientific and technology jobs at Grand Sky, the region worked to build create pathways for transitioning service members through educational and civilian employment opportunities within the region. Grand Sky tenants—such as Northrup Grumman and General Atomics Aeronautical Systems—create jobs that require similar skills to what service members learn in the Air Force, and this creates clear pathway into civilian employment. The base’s transition assistance programs and Skillbridge program actively coordinate with area employers to build other pathways to locally-based careers.

The region’s post-secondary educational institutions (e.g., UND) further support these efforts by providing education and training opportunities for veterans and active-duty personnel. Service members can also transfer credits from the Community College of the Air Force, thereby shortening the time necessary to complete their programs. This pipeline also works both ways as the UND ROTC program also works with the base.

Although Grand Forks may not seem like a retirement destination, the general sentiment is that people like the region once they are there. The State of North Dakota is also making efforts around education, healthcare, licensing and military retirement to make it more attractive to military retirees. It is now estimated that 1 out of every 4 service members transitioning out of Grand Forks AFB remain in the region. This workforce is critical for creating the good paying, STEM-related jobs necessary to form a strong economic base. Creating these opportunities required a lot of time, patience, collaboration, and political support, but these efforts are not allowing the region to build a stronger workforce and diversity its economy.

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### **Unique military skills and knowledge can advance regional economic development opportunities**

Although many veteran and military attraction efforts are broadly intended to strengthen the state's overall workforce, some states and communities have used these tools as to advance more specific economic development efforts. For instance, Grand Forks, ND is leveraging the Grand Forks Air Force Base's Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) to attract and retain the region's transitioning military. Over the past 15 years the surrounding region has worked to create a cluster of private sector activity around UAS that allows service members to transition in high quality civilian jobs that uses the skills they learned in the service (See Box 2 for more details). In Omaha, specialized service members working at U.S. Strategic Command sometimes retire from the service and then return there to work as federal civilian employees or private contractors.

Other states have targeted transitioning military to help staff critical occupations. For example, Kentucky used the Skillbridge program to prepare military police (MPs) for civilian law enforcement. Although there can be a five month wait to enter Kentucky's police academy, the Commonwealth allows transitioning MPs to move to the front of the queue. They can then attend Kentucky's police academy while still in the service as part of the Skillbridge program. This enables them to start working almost immediately after they complete their transition out of the military. Reducing this wait time minimizes the amount of time they are not earning a paycheck after their discharge. Other places have sought to leverage other specialties by, for instance, attracting medics trained at San Antonio's combat medic training center to work in healthcare related professions (e.g., EMTs, Nursing).

It should be noted that focusing military attraction efforts on specific industries or occupations does not always lead to successful outcomes for the state or the veteran. For instance, in the mid-2010s western Pennsylvania had a military transition program that targeted the energy (i.e., fracking) and manufacturing industries.<sup>19</sup> This program failed to get traction and had a quiet sunset as it was launched at time when natural gas prices fell and the fossil fuel industry in Pennsylvania shed jobs. As a result, places must ensure that these targeted industries provide stable or growing employment opportunities, or that the skill required by these industries are transferable to other lines of work.

### **Post-secondary education can attract transitioning military**

For some veterans, especially younger veterans, transitioning into civilian life means moving into higher education. Therefore, access to relevant—and affordable—higher education can influence their decision about where to live when they leave the service. Some states have made higher education more accessible by providing financial benefits and support programs for military personnel and veterans attending public education. States have also worked to create more efficient and transparent processes for awarding credit for prior military learning.

### **Educational benefits beyond the G.I. Bill can entice transitioning military to return home**

The [Post 9/11 G.I. Bill](#) is the main benefit available to veterans nationwide and a prominent enlistment incentive. Several states have found other ways to provide veterans with additional post-secondary educational benefits. By funding or discounting higher education states can make themselves more

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<sup>19</sup> [https://www.allegHENYconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/EAGP\\_DoE\\_EnergyRoundtable071715.pdf](https://www.allegHENYconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/EAGP_DoE_EnergyRoundtable071715.pdf)

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attractive to veterans and/or their families. Given rising post-secondary education costs these additional incentives can influence relocation decisions.

The State of Texas' [Hazlewood Act](#) provides 150 credit hours at the state's public post-secondary institutions for veterans who were Texas residents at the time of their enlistment.<sup>20</sup> In 2009, Texas expanded the program so that it now covers eligible veterans, legacy relatives (resident children of eligible veterans who are currently residents of TX), and the children and spouses of eligible permanently disabled<sup>21</sup> or KIA soldiers. Recipients can split their benefits between children, or between the veteran and their children, but they cannot use these benefits simultaneously with their Post 9/11 G.I. Bill benefits.

The Hazlewood Act incentivizes Texans to join the service after high school and then, importantly, return to Texas upon completing that service. There is no requirement, however, for Hazlewood Act recipients to stay in Texas after they complete their education. In FY 21, almost 36,000 Texas students used Hazlewood Act benefits; of which 8,415 were Veterans, 20,048 were legacy relatives, 5,962 children and 1,529 spouses of deceased or eligible permanently disabled veterans. Roughly 70 percent of these students attended 4-year institutions and another 26 percent attended community colleges.<sup>22</sup> Despite these benefits, the state does not aggressively market this program because post-secondary institutions may view it as an unfunded mandate.<sup>23</sup>

Wisconsin is another state using financial educational benefits to attract veterans and their families. The [Wisconsin G.I. Bill](#) provides tuition remission benefits of up to 128 credits or 8 semesters (whichever is longer) at the state's public universities, community and technical colleges. Eligible veterans and their spouses and children must be Wisconsin residents at the time of application and remain living in Wisconsin while they use the benefit (unless serving on active duty).<sup>24</sup>

These efforts require a significant resource commitment from the state and/or the public post-secondary institutions, but other states have shown that there are other less costly ways to make public education more accessible and affordable for veterans. For instance, North Carolina eased the residency requirements for active-duty military and their families by waiving the 12-month residency requirements and immediately providing in-state tuition. Transitioning military can continue to receive in-state tuition rates once they leave the service, provided they establish North Carolina residency within 30 days of their discharge.<sup>25</sup>

Missouri does not possess programs as expansive as those found in Texas or Wisconsin, but the [Missouri Returning Heroes' Education Act](#) limits the cost of post-secondary education for eligible combat

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<sup>20</sup> Enacted in 1923, the Texas legislature—through the Hazlewood Act—directed the state's public universities to cover the college costs of the state's World War 1 veterans, nurses and their children. As a result, it is one of the nation's oldest veteran's benefits programs and predates the G.I. Bill.

<sup>21</sup> Permanently disabled (eligible) veterans do not need to be Texas residents while their children or spouses use the benefits.

<sup>22</sup> Among the institutions 25,475 students at 4-year with over 2,000 at each of Texas A&M, Texas State, and UT-San Antonio. Another 9,422 attended community colleges, and roughly 1,000 or so at the state's health or technical colleges.

<sup>23</sup> Although the state has provided some funding to its public post-secondary institutions to cover some costs, the cost burden falls primarily on the institutions and this burden grew as the program expanded and the higher education costs rise.

<sup>24</sup> The WI G.I. Bill also provides benefits for unremarried surviving spouses, and the children of certain deceased and disabled veterans.

<sup>25</sup> <https://registrar.unc.edu/academic-services/residency/special-residency-provisions/military-benefits/>

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veterans. Tuition costs for eligible combat veterans is limited to \$50 per undergraduate credit hour or no more than 30 percent of the cost of tuitions and fees for graduate programs. To qualify, veterans must be Missouri residents at the time of their enlistment,<sup>26</sup> or be eligible to vote in Missouri or a current Missouri resident. Missouri's program is more limited than the benefits found in these other states, as the focus on combat veterans<sup>27</sup> limits the number of eligible veterans able to take advantage of this program.

### **Awarding credit for prior military learning allows veterans to complete degrees faster**

In addition to providing post-secondary educational benefits for military, veterans, and their families, states can make it easier for veterans to complete their education by awarding credit for prior military learning. This prior military learning can take several forms. For instance, each service member's Joint Service Transcript (JST) documents formal course training received in the military.<sup>28</sup> Since this training occurs in a more formal learning environment, post-secondary institutions can use the JST to award college credit. Beyond more formal courses, active-duty military also receive professional development opportunities that often focus more on soft skill training related to managing people or resources, and occupation learning experiences are more equivalent to on-the-job training. The more the learning experiences deviate from formal educational courses, the more complicated they are to translate into college credits.<sup>29</sup> Many colleges and universities rely on resources and guideline provided by the American Council on Education (ACE) to help in this translation process.

In total, 35 states and the District of Columbia (as of 2020) have adopted state policies and/or legislation directing post-secondary institutions to award credit for prior military learning.<sup>30</sup> Translating these prior learning experiences into college credit, however, often occurs inconsistently between states and between institutions. States can mandate that institutions recognize prior learning, but actual implementation can be a complicated process that requires many considerations. For instance, post-secondary institutions often only award credit for elective courses and not required courses, so this can slow the veteran student's progress toward completing their degree or certification.<sup>31</sup>

To improve the processes for translating competencies and experiences into meaningful college credits, 13 mid-western states (including Missouri)—with financial support from the Lumina Foundation and

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<sup>26</sup> For survivors, the qualifying military member must have been a Missouri resident at the time of their death or injury.

<sup>27</sup> In this context, 'Combat veteran' means a person who served in armed combat in the military after September 11, 2001. They must present military service documentation that shows their service in a combat theater, receipt of combat service medals, or receipt of imminent danger or hostile fire pay or tax benefits.

<sup>28</sup> Members of the Air Force receive formal course training through the Community College of the Air Force, so translating this training to colleges and universities are more akin to typical articulation agreements between community colleges and universities.

<sup>29</sup> Kratzer, D., Soares, L., and Spires, M. 2020 'Recognition of Learning Across Military and Corporate Settings: How ACE Blends Standard Processes, Disciplinary Expertise, and Context to Ensure Quality'. Boulder, CO: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. Available at: <https://www.wiche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ACE-brief-020821.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Garcia, R. and Leibrandt, S. 2020. 'The Current State of Prior Learning Policies.' Boulder, CO: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. Available at <https://www.wiche.edu/key-initiatives/recognition-of-learning/pla-policies/>

<sup>31</sup> Kratzer, D., Soares, L., and Spires, M. 2020 'Recognition of Learning Across Military and Corporate Settings: How ACE Blends Standard Processes, Disciplinary Expertise, and Context to Ensure Quality'. Boulder, CO: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. Available at: <https://www.wiche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ACE-brief-020821.pdf>



### **Box 3: Attracting transitioning military by awarding credit for prior military learning**

Kansas has made expanding credit for prior military learning a priority and has used these efforts to promote to service members transitioning out of Fort Riley, Fort Leavenworth, and elsewhere. The Kansas Board of Regents has facilitated these efforts, but implementation truly requires coalition of willing partners. Institutional leadership must make these efforts a priority, implementation occurs at the ground level with faculty champions and instructors playing important roles.

As an important initial step, Kansas connected college instructors with military instructors. For instance, Kansas brought HVAC instructors from the U.S. Army's Quartermaster Corps and Quartermaster School Fort Lee in Virginia to Kansas to work with participating community college instructors. Army instructors shared detailed information about the skills—more than the time spent in classrooms—that service members must master for different Military Occupational Specialties (in this instance, Utilities Equipment Repairer Enlisted—Army MOS 91c). College instructors and the institution's academic affairs staff can then how to award credit for that program based on the service member's JST.

Kansas has learned that transparency is critical to ensure that transitioning military and veterans can take advantage of these opportunities. As a result, the Kansas Board of Regents developed the [Military Articulation Portal](#) that shows the credit awarded by MOS at each post-secondary institution. This transparency serves two purposes. First, it allows service members and veterans to find the institution that best fits their needs by awarding the most credit for their relevant programs. Second, it creates institutional competition because those offering more credit might be better positioned to attract these potential students. Through its portal the Board of Regents can foster this competition, but it also needs to regulate it to ensure that institutions adhere to the standards and guideline.

Given that access to educational opportunities can factor into post-military location decisions, Kansas has promoted these efforts to transitioning service members. Consequently, there are billboards near Fort Riley and Fort Leavenworth highlighting these opportunities. Moreover, Barton Community College and Kansas State have a presence at Fort Riley so there are institutional representatives available there to further promote these opportunities.

At present, the state's community colleges tend to be relatively more engaged in awarding credit for prior military learning. Moving forward, Kansas wants to increase the number of credits awarded through military articulation. It has also prioritized broadening the nature of credits awarded so it is not just CTE-type programs (e.g., diesel technicians), but there is also an increase in the awarded credits pertaining to subjects such as entrepreneurship and management.

Strada Education—created the [Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit](#).<sup>32</sup> It also received technical assistance from groups like ACE and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), among others to help these states design best practices for translating military training and experiences into

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<sup>32</sup> In addition to Missouri, this collaborative includes Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

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credits, certifications, and licenses.

Some states like Kansas (See Box 3) have become leaders in this effort by effectively taking steps to increase the availability of, and transparency about, credit for prior learning. In support of these efforts, the Kansas Board of Regents created a [Military Articulation Portal](#) that allows veterans and servicemembers to review the credit for prior learning available at the state's public post-secondary institution. These efforts have not only fostered greater competition between institutions, but also given the state another way to market itself to soldiers transitioning out of Fort Riley and Fort Leavenworth. In Missouri, most institutions have a military credit review program. However, credit awards are not always consistently applied, and the state does not yet have a centralized, public database where veterans can find all this information.

### **Prior military learning can further contribute to professional certification completions**

Veterans and transitioning service members may also pursue non-degree educational opportunities. States and communities can better, and more quickly, position transitioning military and veterans for quality employment opportunities by providing access to training, certifications, and apprenticeship programs. For instance, Washington State's [VIE-25](#) (Veteran Industry Education) program supports pathways to employment for transitioning military (and their spouses) by connecting them to community and technical college certification programs within 25 miles of their military installation. Area schools identify existing programs with industry certifications that can be completed within six months, and then much like the Skillbridge program, service members (who receive permission) can complete these programs in the 6-month window leading up to their retirement date. Led through the governor's office, the VIE-25 program involves close collaboration between the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges and each region's respective garrison command to create additional pathways to employment for transitioning service members.

Missouri has also developed programs to strengthen training opportunities for veterans. For instance, the '[Show Me Heroes](#)' On-the-Job Training (OJT) program reimburses employers for a portion of their training costs, and connects them to veterans who possess the work ethic and some of the skills they need. More recently, the State of Missouri—in partnership with the Missouri National Guard—has launched the [Project Eagle Apprenticeship Program](#). This program helps national guardsman to take the learning that occurs during their duty hours and apply it toward a nationally recognized credential that aligns with their Military Occupational Specialty.

### **Quality places are critical for retaining military families after they leave the service**

Military families will likely stay or return to places where they had positive experiences and the types of places they viewed as offering a good quality of life. Therefore, military communities must make a good impression both inside and outside the gate, as well as throughout the broader region and state. This is sometimes easier said than done, as there is no single definition of quality of life. For some service members greater quality of life means access to recreational or outdoor amenities, while others may prioritize access to veteran healthcare. School quality is an important consideration for many military families and for active-duty military families [Purple Star schools](#) can demonstrate the community's commitment to ensuring proper support for military connected students and families. In 2022, Missouri

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had 4 Purple Star districts and 6 Purple Star Schools (all in the Warrensburg R-VI district).<sup>33</sup> Over the longer-term, military communities may retain transitioning military families because they may want to keep stability and consistency for their school-aged children, but that relies on the schools maintaining adequate quality.

Service members and their families may view a low cost of living positively, but a 2018 University of Central Missouri study<sup>34</sup> showed that this was a double-edged sword. The low of cost of living may reflect the fact that area wages are also low, and this can limit the ability of military spouses to find good paying and meaningful work. Military spouses in Missouri's military communities also noted the lack of available childcare. Both factors—low wages and a lack of childcare—can impact a military spouse's ability to work and in turn shape their perception of the community. It should be noted that these challenges are not necessarily unique to Missouri's military communities. A 2019 report by the Washington State Military Transition and Readiness Council<sup>35</sup> highlighted that a lack of available and affordable childcare, both on and off Washington State's military bases, limited the ability for military spouses to find work.

### Marketing to veterans, transitioning military and their families

The employment, education, and financial benefits described above can incentivize transitioning military and their families to either return home or relocate to a state where they have no pre-existing ties. However, if service members are unaware of these incentives and opportunities during their transition window none of this will matter. A competitive portfolio of benefits and opportunities is necessary to attracting transition military and their families, but it is not sufficient. States must therefore actively tell their story and sell their state. This requires getting information into their hands before they decide where to start their civilian life.

Active-duty service members either living in Missouri, or with experience living in Missouri, may already be familiar with what the state has to offer. However, any consideration about staying or returning to the state will be shaped by their experience. This section examines the different approaches states and communities take to promote and position themselves as veteran-friendly places. Given the diversity of veterans (e.g., retired, mid-career, young) and military families, this often requires multiple messages.

### There are multiple ways to promote states to transitioning military

If states do not tell a compelling story about why they are a preferred destination for veterans and their families, then the incentives or services they offer will not serve their intended purpose. Therefore, attracting and retaining transitioning military and their families is very much a marketing challenge and some states attack this challenge more aggressively than others. In 2018, the State of Wisconsin dedicated \$1.9 million to create the Mission Wisconsin Military Talent Attraction campaign that

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<sup>33</sup> <https://dese.mo.gov/four-school-districts-and-six-schools-receive-purple-star-designation>

<sup>34</sup> Huffman, J., Kiger, A, and Stockdale, C. 2018. 'A National Analysis of Efforts to Improve the Quality of Life of Military Servicemembers and Their Families with Recommendations for Missouri Policymakers', prepared by the University of Central Missouri for the Office of the Missouri Military Advocate. Available at: <https://military.ded.mo.gov/media/mmpec-report/national-analysis-efforts-improve-quality-life-service-members-and-their>

<sup>35</sup> [https://dva.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-02/MilSpouse\\_ListeningSessions\\_SummaryReport.pdf](https://dva.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-02/MilSpouse_ListeningSessions_SummaryReport.pdf)

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encouraged veterans and their families to live and work in the state.<sup>36</sup> Through this interagency effort, the state developed a series of marketing materials targeting transitioning military and their spouses.<sup>37</sup> Working in partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Hiring Our Heroes program, state representatives also traveled to U.S. military bases around the country to promote Wisconsin at hiring events for transitioning military.<sup>38</sup> The state also created materials to show how Wisconsin compared to other states, as well as a [search tool](#) that allows transitioning military and veterans to find available job opportunities that most align with their military training and experience.

In 2020, the pandemic and a change in administration led Wisconsin step back from these more active marketing efforts, which in turn caused the Mission Wisconsin effort to shift focus. It now operates outside of state government as a non-profit [military talent attraction company](#). It still promotes Wisconsin as a place to live and work, provides resume coaching for transition military, and then facilitates connections between Wisconsin-based employers and potential workers. It also seeks to connect transitioning military and their spouses with other available support services, as well as local veterans' groups and organizations. Although Mission Wisconsin benefited from its initial state involvement, leaving state government allowed it to become flexible and nimbler in its work with military families.

The Indiana-based non-profit INVets is another organization focused on attracting transitioning military and their families to strengthen the state workforce.<sup>39</sup> The INVets website ([www.INvets.org](http://www.INvets.org)) is the organization's primary vehicle for sharing information and connecting to interested veterans. While the website offers a self-service option, the INVets staff also helps with job searches through resume counseling and by providing a more direct connection to hiring managers at veteran-friendly businesses. Like other similar organizations, INVets provides networking support that goes beyond the job search. As a result, it also works to connect its clients with the state's veteran support groups and organizations. Among the transitioning military and veterans that register for more information and support on the INVets website, approximately 10% have gone on to become new Indiana residents. In 2020 INVets had 2,400 new people sign up on their website and 230 became new Indiana residents; in 2021 those numbers increased to 3,900 new sign ups and 395 new residents.

Similar to Mission Wisconsin, INVets sends representatives to on-base hiring events to promote the state. These active promotion missions can help states connect with transitioning service members before they make their location decision, but they can nevertheless prove expensive. As INVets works toward achieving greater sustainability, its active promotion efforts increasingly rely on an ambassador model. So rather than Indiana-based representatives traveling to hiring events around the country, the

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<sup>36</sup> This effort was one element a broader state talent attraction marketing campaign.

<sup>37</sup> The idea was initiated by the Wisconsin Department of Veteran Affairs, was led by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, and also involved the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

<sup>38</sup> Some of the greatest interest in Wisconsin came from service members in Okinawa (where service members cannot stay) and Hawaii (where they cannot afford to stay).

<sup>39</sup> INVets began with a more limited focus on connecting veterans to jobs in several Indiana manufacturers, but with funding from the state the mission shifted more toward attracting transitioning military and veterans to support the Indiana's overall workforce.

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organization now looks to hire someone (e.g., retired military, military spouse, etc.) living in areas with multiple military installations (e.g., Eastern North Carolina) which in turn creates savings in travel costs.

There are other, less active, avenues for reaching transitioning military. For instance, publications like *Military Officer* magazine<sup>40</sup> periodically has articles about the 'Top States for Military Retirees' and publishes its own [Military State Report Card and Tax Guide](#). These kinds of magazines are one way in which groups like transitioning officers get the information they need to inform their future location decisions. Some states and military communities incorporate military and defense-related themes and information into their place marketing efforts, and most state workforce development agencies provide information directed toward transitioning military and veterans (e.g., [Ohio](#)). As a result, they are not necessarily creating entirely new marketing campaigns, but rather layering military-themed messages into their existing state efforts.

The Missouri Governor's Office sends letters that highlight the benefits of moving to Missouri (e.g., no taxation of retirement benefits, low cost of living, etc.) to transitioning soldiers who identify as Missouri residents. Responding veterans then receive a point of contact to help them with personalized employment services. These other states offer examples of different, or perhaps more aggressive, approaches to marketing and branding efforts directed toward transitioning methods. However, those efforts also require significant commitments of focus and resources.

### Marketing efforts should reflect the military community's diversity

Transitioning military and their families are not a monolithic group, so marketing campaigns must recognize their differences. Figure 2 shows how different groups (e.g., retired veterans, spouses and families, etc.) may prioritize different features or benefits when determining where to live after their military career ends. For instance, younger service members (e.g., those serving 6 years or less than 25) may prioritize employment and educational opportunities, but those with strong technical backgrounds (e.g., aircraft maintenance) may try to leverage those skills before they pursue post-secondary education. By contrast, some junior officers may plan to use their Post 9/11 G.I. Bill benefits to pursue a graduate or professional degree (e.g., MBA, JD, etc.). Proximity to family and quality-of-life factors may play a larger role for older service members, and some retirees may wish to remain in their last station if the local schools can provide stability and a quality education for their school-aged children.

Career opportunities can also drive decisions for older transitioning service members. A second civilian career can help military retirees maintain their quality of life and further build their retirement accounts. Many will find these careers by leveraging their military background. For instance, a retired submarine officer may look to take advantage of their security clearance and nuclear power background. As a result, they will be drawn to places like Washington, DC, Connecticut, the Hampton Roads, San Diego or Washington State, where these career opportunities are concentrated. When veterans look to fully retire and leave the workforce, factors such as quality of life, tax exemptions for military retirement, and access to affordable (i.e., V.A. hospitals) healthcare may more greatly influence their decision making.

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<sup>40</sup> *Military Officer* is the magazine of the Military Officers Association of America ([www.moaa.org](http://www.moaa.org)).

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**Figure 2: Select factors for attracting and retaining transitioning military**

Type	Feature/Benefit	Young transition military (<25 yrs. old)	Mid-career ex-Military (25-55 yrs. old)	Active duty spouses and family	Retired Veterans (55+)
Benefits	Tax-free retirement		●		●
	Housing assistance	●		●	
	Free/reduced hunting and fishing licenses, park access	●	●		●
	Relocation assistance	●	●		
Employment	Employment and career opportunities	●	●	●	
	Credential portability, occupational license fee waiver/discounts			●	
	Veteran's preference for state government employment	●	●		
	Veteran-specific employment counseling and resources	●	●		
	Entrepreneurial and business counseling	●	●	●	
Education	Reduced post-secondary educational costs for veterans and families	●	●	●	
	Credit for prior military learning	●	●		
	Availability of relevant educational programs	●	●	●	
Quality of Life	Proximity to family	●	●	●	●
	Connections to military groups, or military spouse groups	●	●	●	●
	Quality housing	●	●	●	●
	School quality	●	●	●	
	Access to veteran's healthcare		●		●
	Outdoor amenities	●	●		●
	Available and affordable daycare			●	

*\*Darker circle is strong retention benefit as well*

Military spouses also have significant influence over post-military residential decisions. Access to career and educational opportunities can inform their decision making, as well as factors like proximity to family and quality schools. If military spouses do not have a positive experience while stationed in a military community, they are not likely to stay there once they leave the service. As a result, ensuring military spouses have access to meaningful employment opportunities, childcare, and quality schools during their service is critical for future retention efforts.

There is also incredible diversity between, and within, these groups so states cannot tell just one story to explain why it is a good location for transition military to live, work, and learn; rather it must tell several different stories to several different groups. Recognizing this marketing challenge, Wisconsin developed [marketing materials](#) that spoke to these different audiences and concerns. These marketing themes included 'Coordinates to Coding' to highlight technical career opportunities, 'Combat Boots to Hiking Boots' to appeal to those interest in outdoor amenities, 'Rucksack to Backpack' which was directed to those interest in pursuing higher education, as well as others marketing themes related to K-12 school quality, urban amenities, and housing.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> These materials were developed at the end of the last decade when Wisconsin made its aggressive push to attract veterans.

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Further complicated matters, efforts to retain active-duty military already in the state will differ from efforts to attract transitioning military with ties to the state. For many active-duty service members and families in Missouri, the most powerful impressions are made by what they experience just outside the gate and as a result they may lack familiarity with what the whole state has to offer. For example, the experiences of service members and their families in the areas immediately surrounding Fort Leonard Wood or Whiteman Air Force Base may inform their general perception of Missouri. Some may be more interested in remaining in Missouri if they had greater awareness about the employment and educational opportunities found in St. Louis, Kansas City, or Springfield, or the recreational opportunities available the Ozarks, the Lakes, or Branson.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, marketing efforts need to showcase the entire state and its diverse communities. Alabama's [Heroes Welcome website](#) includes information about topics such as employment, entrepreneurship, education, and housing for each of the state's seven military communities. Several of these community pages also connect service members and their spouses to personal and professional networking and volunteer opportunities. The defense community informational pages were developed in partnership with local organizations (e.g., local chambers of commerce), so they effectively showcase each of these communities. These efforts bring some consistency between state and local marketing efforts and can expose service members and their families to parts of the state beyond where they are stationed.

As noted earlier, attracting and retaining transitioning military and their families is very much a marketing challenge. States must therefore first decide the story (or more appropriately, stories) that will encourage potential new residents to consider moving or staying in the state. They then must determine how—and how aggressively—they want to tell that story. Positive experiences will lead to word-of-mouth marketing (and negative experiences will have the opposite effect), but targeted and thoughtful marketing can also shape perceptions within the military community.

### **Creating the conditions for a more military-friendly state**

Many of the programs, incentives and benefits described above are transactional in nature and often involves direct interaction with veterans, transitioning military and their families. However, states and communities can take additional steps to create more attractive and welcoming environments for them as they embark on their civilian life. These steps often involve effective leadership and collaboration between government, employers, non-profits, and educators. Ultimately building this more veteran engaged ecosystem involves working with partners to ensure welcoming locations for veterans and their families to live, learn and work.

### **The state plays an important role in leading and coordinating support efforts**

Ensuring the effective delivery of veteran services and benefits requires coordinating public, private, non-profit and educational partners. This coordination relies on strong relationships and regular

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<sup>42</sup> For instance, Fort Leonard Wood's [Lake of the Ozarks Recreation Area](#) provides outdoor recreational opportunities for active-duty military, retired military, National Guardsmen, reservists, DoD employees, military family members, and Fort Leonard Wood contract employees. While people within the FLW community may be aware of this recreational area, veterans with less familiarity with FLW may lack awareness of this attraction and that might be a draw for them.

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communication. In Missouri, state offices like the Missouri Military Advocate<sup>43</sup> and local groups like the Sustainable Ozarks Partnership near Fort Leonard Wood, the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce and Johnson County Economic Development Corporation around Whiteman Air Force Base, or the Taylor Geospatial Institute in St. Louis all play important roles in supporting and leading efforts in support of the state's Department of Defense-related activities and installations.

Examples from other states show that what these offices may lack in resources, they make up for in convening power. For instance, the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs staffs the state's [Military Transition and Readiness Council \(WSMTC\)](#). The WSMTC can convene state agencies, higher education, leading employers, and the leadership from the state's multiple military installations to establish priority issues (i.e., spousal employment, credential portability), forge partnerships, and create communities of practice to address these priority issues.

Leaders and conveners are also necessary at the local level. Known as 'Military City, USA', San Antonio supports regional collaboration through groups like the Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA) Alliance. Staffed by the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, the JBSA Alliance—which includes base leadership, local government partners, non-profits, and some employers—meets regularly to discuss key issues facing the region's installations as well as service members and their families. These regular meetings create venues for information sharing and opportunities to build collaborative solutions to local challenges.

These regional partnerships can also play important advocacy roles. For instance, the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce's Defense, Veterans, and Military (DVM) Affairs committee—which includes approximately 50 members drawn from veteran-owned small businesses, defense contractors, and relevant non-profits—works to grow the region's defense community. As part of its work, the DVM Affairs committee helped organize advocacy efforts related to issues such as statewide military retirement tax relief and greater credential portability for military spouses.

This kind of leadership and collaboration is necessary to advance issues that can make states and places attractive for veterans and their families. At the community level, these efforts are also critical for addressing more local issues that determine the extent to which active-duty military and their families enjoy their stay there. These coordinating efforts are essential because no progress will be made if no one person or organization is paying attention to—and taking responsibility for—these activities.

### **Engaging the employer community can lay the groundwork for a more military-friendly state**

Public policy issues can help shape the environment for veterans, but some states also focus on creating more veteran-friendly employer communities. Successfully connecting transitioning service members to job opportunities requires employers that not only see the value in hiring veterans and military spouses, but also know how to recruit, hire, and retain them. [Virginia Values Veterans](#) (V3) and [North Carolina for](#)

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<sup>43</sup> Not all states have an equivalent position. Advocating for states to create similar positions is one of priority issues being advanced by the [Association of Defense Communities](#) (ADC), which is a national membership organization that advocates for military communities across the country and provides them with a forum for peer learning.



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[Military Employment](#) (NC4ME)<sup>44</sup> represents two notable state programs that work to educate and prepare employers to become more veteran-friendly.

These programs work at multiple levels. For instance, program representatives connect with the private sector's strategic leadership to promote the value of, and dispel any myths about, hiring veterans and military spouses. These meetings help establish the hiring of these workers as a priority. Program representatives—often in conjunction with local Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) chapters—also engage with human resources managers who are the gatekeepers to hiring managers. These engagements often focus more on the 'how to' elements for hiring veterans and military connected workers. As a result, these programs and trainings cover several topics, such as reading military resumes, introducing key programs like Skillbridge, and understanding guard and reserve commitments, among others.

These programs better position and prepare employers to hire veterans and military spouses. In Virginia, the benefits of a V3 Certification can qualify employers for grants that reward employers for hiring veterans or enable them to participate in veteran-related job fairs or hiring events. Moreover, a V3 certification signals to veterans and military spouses that the company is veteran-friendly. Creating a deeper pool of veteran-friendly employers can lead to more quality job opportunities for transitioning military entering the civilian workplace and that, in turn, can make the state a more attractive place for them to live.

### **Engaging post-secondary educational institutions can lead to more veteran student success**

As noted earlier, higher education is a common landing spot for service members transitioning out of the military. Higher education comes with its own set of challenges, such as learning about the range of benefits and support services, seeking credit for the learning and training they received while in the service, and simply reintegrating into civilian life. States and their post-secondary institutions can take steps to ensure the success of military and veteran students.

Home Base Iowa's Certified Higher Academic Military Program (CHAMPs) designates different Iowa-based institutions as military-friendly. The CHAMPs program requires institutions to demonstrate, through several criteria, that they are military-friendly. These criteria many relate to their on-campus veteran resources (e.g., full time veteran's services coordinator, physical space for veteran centers or study areas), military transition considerations (e.g., credit for prior military learning and training), and financial consideration (e.g., in-state tuition for eligible veterans and military connected family).

Currently, there are 28 HBI CHAMP-designated institutions including 2-year, 4-year, public and private Iowa-based institutions. This designation can help transitioning military and veterans make choices about where to pursue higher education and use their G.I. Bill benefits.

In 2018, the University of Central Missouri reviewed the veteran's benefits and services offered at

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<sup>44</sup> Both programs were started by Kimberly Williams, the current CEO of NC4ME.

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Missouri's public colleges and universities.<sup>45</sup> This analysis showed that almost every institution had a veteran's benefits (VA) liaison and 85 percent of the state's public institutions offered a military credit review program. Other veteran support efforts included student veteran organizations, veteran work study programs, and designated veteran centers. Less common benefits included school-specific scholarships and aid and priority enrollment. Three institutions—University of Missouri-St. Louis, University of Missouri-Columbia, and the University of Central Missouri—provided each of the benefits included in that study.

### **There are many ways to demonstrate that a community is 'military-friendly'**

Transitioning military and their families often want to move to military-friendly communities. Beyond state incentives, communities can provide services and incentives to make it easier to relocate. For instance, in 2021 Airbnb provided vouchers to the Maine-based organization [Boots2Roots](#), so that transitioning military could explore Maine communities before they committed to relocating there.<sup>46</sup> Maine tends to attract older service members so ensuring that they are comfortable with Maine as a place to live is an important consideration.

The Home Base Iowa program has also created an organized way for Iowa communities to demonstrate—through their words and resource commitments—that they welcome military families. To achieve the Home Base Iowa community designation, communities must secure civic and employer support, as well as create their own community incentives for veterans. For instance, [Clinton County](#) (Eastern Iowa) offers incentives to make it easier for veterans to move to the county by offering a one-time home purchase closing cost reimbursement of up to \$1,500 for a home located in the county. The county has also committed to waive its first-year business license fee for veterans opening a business in the county.

These incentives exist in other places, although not part of a broader state program. For example, Orange County, Indiana (French Lick, IN) has sought to attract veterans with the goal of offsetting population loss and strengthening its workforce. As a result, it started a relocation incentive program that gives exiting military \$5,000 if they relocate to the county after their discharge.<sup>47</sup> This program requires recipients to be younger than 45 and maintain their Orange County residency for two years.

The extent to which these local incentives influence the location decisions made by transitioning military remains to be seen. These local incentives do, however, allow communities to demonstrate that they are willing to put some skin in the game to make it more military-friendly. In addition, these local efforts can help to build a stronger coalition of advocates for more military-friendly policies and programs across the state.

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<sup>45</sup> Huffman, J., Kiger, A, and Stockdale, C. 2018. 'A Comprehensive Analysis of Missouri's Efforts to Improve the Quality of Life of Military Servicemembers and Their Families', prepared by the University of Central Missouri for the Office of the Missouri Military Advocate. Available at: <https://military.ded.mo.gov/media/mmpec-report/comprehensive-analysis-missouris-efforts-improve-quality-life-service-members>

<sup>46</sup> <https://news.airbnb.com/supporting-and-growing-our-community-of-veteran-hosts/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.choosesouthernindiana.com/orange-county-relocation-pro>

### Connecting to civic and social networks can support the transition process

These programs and incentives help communities signal that they are military-friendly, but it is also important to enable veterans and their families to build relationships in those communities. For military communities, this network building must begin while service members are still on active duty. Positive experiences can lead to service members and their families to stay or return to those communities when they leave the service. A failure to make meaningful connections can lead to negative experiences and service members, and especially military spouses, may feel isolated and disconnected.

Over the past several years, the Alabama Military Stability Foundation (AMSF) has made military families a greater part of its mission. Consequently, AMSF created a Military Family Liaison position to support military families, in large part by providing families with the information they need to settle into the state's military communities. The Military Family Liaison has worked with different community groups (e.g., local chambers of commerce) to provide community information as a way of creating a welcome wagon to help military families figure things out quickly as they change station.

A key element of these efforts involved AMSF partnering with the [Military Spouse Advocacy Network \(MSAN\)](#) to create the [Alabama Mentorship-HUB](#).<sup>48</sup> The Alabama Mentorship HUB is an online portal that connects military spouses to mentors and resources that can help improve their overall experience in the state. Through this portal military spouses can access 24/7 peer mentorship covering a variety of topics including employment, mental health, education, or connecting to realtors, schools, tutors, or activities for kids, among other things. The MASN mentors are trained military spouses that can share information and support and help create a sense of community. The Alabama Mentorship-HUB therefore offers more reliable information and guidance than the informal Facebook groups that often fill this role, and as a result contributes to a more positive experience for Alabama's active personnel and their families. This resource is available to military spouses that are either living in or moving to the state, including those in the guard and reserves.

Ensuring a positive community experience is not only important for active-duty military and their families, but also for veterans who are new to a community. While many attraction efforts focus primarily on connecting transitioning military and military spouses to employment opportunities, some organizations also seek to create connections to veteran networks. For instance, initiatives such as INvets, Mission Wisconsin, and Maine's Boots to Roots also attempt to connect transitioning military to other veterans and veteran groups. In addition to connecting veterans to education and employment opportunities, Idaho's [Mission43](#) also creates engagement and networking opportunities for veterans by hosting coffee hours (non-alcoholic), happy hours, races and other outdoor events. Similarly, [Combined Arms](#)—a Texas-based veterans support organization—seeks to build different types of veteran communities (e.g. in the energy industry, with special immigrant visas, Christian veterans, LGBTQ veterans) in order to help with the transition process. These networks can help veterans and their families effectively transition to civilian life and make the new community a place where they live as well as a place where they work.

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<sup>48</sup> MSAN has built similar resources for individual military communities, but this was the first with a state focus.

While attraction and retention efforts often focus on the economic and financial wellbeing of transitioning military and their families, these social networking programs highlight the importance of their social wellbeing as well. Facilitating connections between people with similar backgrounds and experience can help connect and embed these veterans within the community. Again, this can lead to more positive experiences which generate more positive word of mouth marketing within the military and veteran community. Several representatives from state veteran recruitment organizations noted that additional leads have come from transitioning military and veterans who elected to live somewhere else, but nevertheless had a positive experience with these organizations and passed their contact information on to friends.

### **Opportunities to strengthen Missouri's appeal to transitioning military**

Many veterans, transitioning military and military families move for many of the same reasons that people not connected to military move, be it tax benefits, proximity to family, quality job opportunities, or attractive climates. Nevertheless, states can offer incentives that can help entice transitioning military to stay, encourage them to return to their original home, or consider an entirely new location. As noted above, these attractions and incentives speak to different parts of the military community, so no single program or incentive will sway a location decision.

Many states seek to attract transitioning military and their families, but all states have areas where they might improve their relative attractiveness and Missouri is no exception. Relative to other states, Missouri offers a competitive set of benefits, opportunities, and support services. However, this report shows that opportunities remain for Missouri to strengthen its competitive position by learning from the efforts of other states. As a result, this section lays out several strategies that Missouri might consider. These strategies fall into three categories, and include those that:

- Make Missouri more attractive to transitioning military and their families, in part by making it easier for them to take advantage of Missouri-based opportunities,
- Promote Missouri as a destination and increase awareness about available resources and services, and
- Demonstrate and build Missouri's reputation as a military-friendly state.

This section identifies some potential strategies that would allow Missouri to address some of these ongoing challenges. Although some strategies may require legislation, many will just need a commitment of time and resources from the public, private, non-profit and educational leaders. State government may be expected to lead some of these efforts, but more often successful implementation will rely upon commitment and collaboration coming from a broader set of stakeholders.

### **Strengthening the product**

States use an array of benefits, programs, and support services to encourage service members and military families to make their state home after they are discharged from the military. These benefits typically allow them to maximize the benefits of their military experience and service. Given the competition for military talent, states must address several key challenges to establish themselves as premier destinations for veterans starting their post-military careers. These challenges include:

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- Ensuring that transitioning service members get the information and support they need so that are not overwhelmed by the volume of information available,
- Effectively connecting transitioning military to good paying employment opportunities that leverage their military experience,
- Making higher education more accessible and affordable by efficiently awarding credit for prior military learning, and
- Creating a better experience for military spouses so they will consider staying, or returning, to the state.

The recommendations described below will enable to address some of these challenges. This, in turn, will allow Missouri to offer a stronger product for the service members and military families that have not yet decided where to begin their civilian life.

- **Recommendation 1.1: Create a system that allows for more seamless system for military credit articulation.**

Missouri must dedicate resources and staff time towards creating a more transparent and robust system for articulating prior military learning into college credit at Missouri public institutions. In Kansas, similar efforts have been led by the state board of regents. Their efforts have shown that greater transparency allows military and veteran students make more informed choices about how to pursue their post-secondary education. Kansas' Military Articulation Portal makes clear what service members and veterans will receive at public institutions based on their JST.

The Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development has begun to identify the staffing and resource needs required to create something similar in Missouri. For instance, technological upgrades are necessary to expand DHEWD's existing programs so that they can handle a new type of credit articulation. These efforts will also require additional staff resources to manage and maintain these data over time.

Efforts to advance these issues in Kansas also show that they often work best as bottom-up efforts led by faculty champions. As a result, Missouri should facilitate connections between Missouri-based faculty and related military trainers to broaden the number of subject areas where students can earn credit from their military training. Often the efforts focus on Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs like diesel mechanics or HVAC and are most relevant to technical and community colleges. Consequently, these efforts should also cover a broad array of subjects, including those that traditionally fall into the domain of 4-year institutions.

A broader approach will allow more students to take advantage of a broader range of potential career opportunities. Kansas has also shown how this type of initiative can be used to sell the state to transitioning service members. As a result, this should be one of Missouri's priority actions.

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- **Recommendation 1.2: Connect transitioning service members to certification programs at nearby community colleges.**

Through its focus on promoting apprenticeships, Missouri has shown the importance of technical training and certifications as alternative paths to employment; the Project Eagle Apprenticeship Program it has applied these efforts toward the state's military workforce. Missouri could further these efforts by adopting a program similar to Washington State's VIE-25 program. Schools near Missouri's major military installations (e.g., State Fair Community College, Ozark Technical College) should identify existing industry certification programs that service members can complete based on their military training and experience. Active-duty service members (who receive permission) could then complete these certifications in the 6-month window leading up to their discharge. This kind of program would better position service members to move more seamlessly into the civilian labor force.

- **Recommendation 1.3: Explore opportunities to expand educational benefits to transitioning military and spouses.**

Currently, the Missouri Returning Heroes Education Act caps tuition at Missouri's Public Institutions at \$50/CH for combat veterans. However, many service members do not experience combat thereby limiting the pool of veterans eligible to use this benefit. States like Texas and Wisconsin offer more expansive educational benefits for veterans and their families, beyond what they receive through the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill. Texas' Hazlewood Act limits eligibility to veterans that were residents of Texas at the time of their enlistment, so its intended purpose is to incentivize them to return to Texas once they have completed their service.

These benefit programs represent a significant incentive, particularly if the eligible veteran can extend those benefits to their family. Missouri should explore options for expanding educational benefits. These additional benefits could take many forms—they could target transitioning military who are new Missouri residents or were Missouri residents at the time of their enlistment, they might apply only to veterans or extend to their families or reimburse the costs of college credits or limit how much veterans must pay. These types of benefits can influence location decisions, but they can also prove expensive. As a result, before designing any specific type of incentive the most important first step will be to better understand how much the state and Missouri's public institutions are willing to commit to it.

- **Recommendation 1.4: Build and/or strengthen talent pipelines that leverage DoD-related activities or base missions.**

Missouri can benefit by better leveraging the military opportunities and military talent already present in the state. For instance, the expansion of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency's (NGA) footprint in St. Louis offers a unique opportunity to attract specialized military talent, and importantly new residents, to the state. Some veterans and transitioning military have the security clearances and the specialized skills that NGA needs. The strategic roadmap for advancing St. Louis' geospatial and location technology cluster, specifically identified

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veterans as a key population for building the region’s pipeline for geospatial talent.<sup>49</sup> Some of this work is already underway, as LaunchCode and the Cortex Innovation Community are currently training veterans for careers in the geospatial industry<sup>50</sup>, and the state should identify ways to continue supporting and promoting the geospatial industry and its associated job opportunities.

While efforts around NGA have the potential to attract new veterans to the state, creating opportunities for the service members transitioning out of Missouri-based facilities can help keep them in the state. For instance, roughly one-third of the 600 service members that transition out of Fort Leonard Wood had an engineering MOS (e.g., Combat Engineer, Heavy Equipment Operator, Geospatial Engineer), and another 17% were in MOS’ related to law enforcement (e.g., Military Police, Military Police Officer, Corrections and Detentions Specialist, etc.).<sup>51</sup> Missouri should organize and support industry-led partnerships to create defined pathways that connect service members transitioning out of these specialties to the relevant civilian training necessary to enter these civilian employment opportunities.<sup>52</sup> Missouri might consider replicating the efforts of places like Kentucky which gave transitioning military participating in the Skillbridge program priority placements in the state police academy. It could also work with construction firms and construction trades unions to ensure that they receive access to any addition training and certifications and create pathways for them to enter in-demand occupations.

- **Recommendation 1.5: Establish a Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone in Missouri’s military communities and continue to pursue other avenues to improve economic opportunities for military spouses.**

Military spouses’ experience in the workforce will shape their perception of Missouri. Missouri has taken some significant strides in addressing some of the most pressing issues, by for instance, passing legislation that allowed military spouses relocating to Missouri to apply for occupational licenses if they hold a valid certification from a state with similar or more stringent requirements. However, other challenges remain at both the state and local level and the U.S. Chamber Foundation’s [Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone](#) (MSEEZ) program provides a framework for identifying and addressing these challenges. This program organizes public, private, and non-profit partners so that they can develop collaborative strategies to create more and better employment opportunities for military spouses.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> [GeoFutures: A Strategic Roadmap for Advancing the Geospatial and Location Technology Cluster in the St. Louis Region](#). Prepared by Teconomy Partners, LLC. June 2020.

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.missouripartnership.com/launchcode-cortex-launch-geospatial-training-program-for-veterans/>

<sup>51</sup> *Employers Guide to Hiring Fort Leonard Wood Transitioning Service Members*. Sustainable Ozarks Partnership.

<sup>52</sup> In the field of Workforce Development these types of efforts are referred to as ‘Sector Strategies’. Sector Strategies are defined as workforce development strategies that help workers move into occupations through targeted training programs (e.g., industry-recognized credentials) and other services developed (e.g., placement) in direct response to employer demand.

<sup>53</sup> The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation provides a [Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone Playbook](#) to help participants understand the value of these efforts and guiding local leaders through the process.

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The MSEEZ program is part of the Hiring Our Heroes program and involves the creation of a Military Spouse Professional Network (MSPN).<sup>54</sup> Since most jobs are filled by referrals, the MSPNs shorten the time it takes for relocating spouses to build professional networks and connect to local business leaders, peers, and mentors. Through these networks, efforts are made to better connect spouses seeking work to local employers with jobs to fill. This programs also involve training for employers about how to best engage and hire military spouses. It also includes training for military spouses through resume coaching or regular workshops that raise awareness about available benefits or support services.

Advocating for critical issues facing military spouses is another critical element of this program, so the MSEEZ program encourages close collaboration with groups like local chambers of commerce to identify and address continued barriers to local employment. Since all places are unique, the MSEEZ program affords the flexibility of program intended to find the best solutions to local challenges. The state of Missouri should set aside resources (with local match requirements) in order to support the establishment and implementation of this program. In large military communities like San Antonio, these efforts have been led by the regional chamber of commerce.

- **Recommendation 1.6: Create tools and venues to better guide military-connected jobseekers through the job search process.**

Specialized labor market information (LMI) tools can further help streamline the job seeking process for military and veterans. Missouri should set aside resources for the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC) to lead efforts to create an LMI tool that helps service members and veterans translate their military experience (i.e., MOS) to help them find employers looking to fill positions in corresponding civilian occupations. The Hampton Roads Workforce Council's [Veterans Career Compass](#) provides an example for how such a tool can help expedite the job seeking process for transitioning military and veterans. The Hampton Roads Veteran Career Compass also has a complementary tool to help military spouses translate their skills and background to help better match them with available employment opportunities.

These tools can help cut through the sea of information available to aid transitioning military in their job search, but other support services are also critical. The public workforce system connects military-connect job seekers to counselors trained to serve their unique needs. The more these service providers can act as the 'lighthouse in the sea of good will', the smoother the transition process. As a result, Missouri should review these support systems and ensure that they are adequately staffed and accessible.

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<sup>54</sup> There are currently more than [55 Military Spouse Professional Networks](#) near military facilities worldwide, but none in Missouri.



## Crafting the message

Missouri faces two primary challenges in marketing itself to transitioning military and their families. These challenges include:

- Many states want to attract transitioning military and their families, so Missouri needs to distinguish itself from other states with similar aspirations—and do so in a way that appeals to the diverse array of people within the military community, and
- The State of Missouri offers a competitive set of incentives (e.g., tax free military retirements, etc.), but many transitioning service members are not fully aware that these benefits, programs, and support services exist or how they can access them.

The recommendations below will advance Missouri’s efforts to 1) shape perceptions about the state as a destination for veterans and military families and 2) raise awareness about the benefits, programs and services available to veterans, transitioning military and their families.

- **Recommendation 2.1: Include messages targeting veterans and the military into state marketing efforts.**

Missouri should develop marketing materials that speak to different types of veterans and military-connected people. Much like Wisconsin’s recent veteran attraction campaign, these materials should speak to the different priorities of veterans or their families. Therefore, marketing themes should emphasize employment and education opportunities and benefits, or military-friendly communities. These marketing efforts should be viewed as a complementary element of the state’s overall marketing campaign. In both Wisconsin and Indiana, these marketing and recruitment efforts are undertaken by non-profit organizations.

The state should also explore opportunities to deliver these messages directly to active-duty service members who are entering their transition window. While these kinds of proactive marketing efforts require more significant resource commitments, they nevertheless can help raise Missouri’s profile within the military community. The state should also share these marketing materials with local regional marketing partners (e.g., regional chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, etc.). By conveying similar messages, the state can present a coordinated message to service members that have yet to decide where to go when they are discharged. Many active-duty military and military spouses only experience what is around Whiteman Air Force Base and Fort Leonard Wood, so more actively marketing what other Missouri communities have to offer can provide them with the full range of what Missouri has to offer.

- **Recommendation 2.2: Expand efforts to promote the programs, benefits, and support services available to transitioning military and their families.**

Missouri offers many benefits and support services, but they often go unused because veterans, transitioning military and their families do not know they exist. This is a common challenge faced by states throughout the country. As a result, Missouri should actively promote these programs and design more avenues to direct interested people towards these programs and

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resources. This may involve promoting information resources such as the Missouri Benefits and Resource Portal for Veterans and Military.

Missouri should also work with designers to create tools that enable the diverse audience of potential users (e.g., active-duty military, older veterans, military-connected family, etc.) to more easily find the information that is most relevant to their individual concerns. These systems should help also encourage users to better self-identify themselves as, for instance, a military spouse or a disabled veteran, so that they can take advantage of any priority services available to them. Moreover, points of contact should be readily apparent so that—if needed—users can receive personalized support to answer any questions. These information services are critical for the state to deliver on its broader marketing messages. They can also ensure a more positive experience for active-duty military and their spouses as they, for instance, attempt to determine their benefit eligibility or navigate the professional recertification process.

### Building the environment

Missouri aspires to be the leading state for veterans and active-duty military. But maintaining this military-friendly environment requires continued work, and doing so requires addressing several common challenges including:

- Many employers lack a deep understanding about how best to recruit, hire and train veterans and military-connected workers,
- Inconsistent services and support for veterans and military-connected students between post-secondary educational institutions, and
- Military spouses face difficulty finding meaningful employment and developing adequate social support networks.

The recommendations described below build greater awareness about how employers, educators, and communities can best interact and serve veterans, transitioning military and their families.

- **Recommendation 3.1: Launch program that trains Missouri employers to recruit, hire, train and retain veterans.**

Most employers see the value of hiring veterans, but not all employers have detailed knowledge about how to effectively recruit, hire, and retain transitioning military and veterans. Working with private sector partners like the state and local chambers of commerce and organizations like the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), Missouri should create a training and certification program modeled after Virginia Values Veterans (V3) or North Carolina for Military Employment (NC4ME). These programs focus training efforts around the ‘how to’ aspects of hiring transitioning military and veteran and therefore covers topics such as reading military resumes, more effectively using programs like Skillbridge and understanding these employees’ national guard or reserve commitments. The V3 program is run by the Virginia Department of Veteran Services, whereas NC4ME is a public-private partnership.

As with the V3 program, an equivalent Missouri program should include a certification for companies that complete this training. In addition to providing a signal that the company is a

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military-friendly employer, this certification should entitle other incentives and benefits. For instance, certified companies might receive preferential access to military hiring events or a modest financial reward for hiring service members transitioning out of one of the state's military bases. In other states these programs have created a deeper pool, not only of veteran-friendly employers, but also of employers who know how best to hire and then utilize skills developed in the military.

- **Recommendation 3.2: Establish a program that certifies post-secondary educational institutions as 'military-friendly' institutions.**

Missouri should emulate Iowa's [Certified Higher Academic Military Partners](#) (CHAMPs) program that designates colleges and universities as military-friendly. To earn this designation, institutions must meet criteria related to their on-campus resources for veterans and military-connected students, including military transition considerations (e.g., credit for military learning), and financial support. This program should also be open to private institutions, not just the state's public colleges and universities.

This type of program will complement the efforts, described above, to create more transparency about awarding college credit for prior military learning. For instance, these designations can help veterans, active-duty service members and military-connected students make more informed choices about which institutions best meet their needs. To increase overall transparency, Missouri should also highlight and promote how each institution fares in terms of the identified criteria. Moreover, this type of program can also foster competition between institutions because they can see how they compare to their competitors and what steps they need to take to become more 'military-friendly'.

- **Recommendation 3.3: Engage with Military Spouse Advocacy Network (MSAN) to create an online portal, similar to the Alabama Mentorship-HUB, that connects military spouses to mentors and resources.**

Missouri should create an online portal to connect military spouses to mentors and resources. This effort could leverage the experiences and model developed by the [Military Spouse Advocacy Network \(MSAN\)](#) and implemented on a statewide basis in Alabama. Much like the [Alabama Mentorship-HUB](#), this portal would give military spouses 24/7 access to peer mentors available to provide support and guidance with issues such as education, employment, and mental health. It can also help them better connect to basic local services like realtors, tutors, or kids' activities, among other things. In Alabama, these efforts have been led by the Alabama Military Family Liaison who works for the Alabama Military Stability Foundation (Alabama's equivalent to the Office of the Missouri Military Advocate).

Whereas the Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone program described above can provide mentors and resources to support military spouses' economic well-being, this kind of portal supports social network building. If spouses feel isolated, alone, and get frustrated because they cannot locate basic support services then they will not leave Missouri with a favorable impression. Providing this kind of support and mentorship helps work toward ensuring

that military spouses have a positive experience in Missouri. Moreover, making this portal available to families that are moving to Missouri (and not just those already here) will enable a smoother transition into their life here.

- **Recommendation 3.4: Dedicate resources to evaluate and assess the impacts of Missouri's veterans-related programs, benefits, and support services.**

To maximize program impacts, Missouri needs to dedicate resources to evaluate the impact of the state's military-related programs, benefits, and support services. This will require dedicating resources and staff time toward completing several key tasks. Program leaders should identify target metrics for each program (e.g., number of users, etc.) and then establish processes for establishing key impacts and collecting data that measures those impacts.

In intervals that make sense for the program Missouri should evaluate each program to determine the extent to which it is meeting, exceeding, or falling short of its objectives. Particularly for benefits and programs that are intended to incentivize transitioning military and their families to Missouri, these evaluations and analysis can help answer the critical 'But For' question; basically, to what extent did the incentive contribute to their decision to start their civilian life in Missouri, or did it just reward them for doing something they would have done regardless of the incentive. This information will allow Missouri to make decisions about which programs to keep, cut, or modify to achieve the greatest outcome. Particularly for programs that prove highly effective and impactful, these metrics can be used to ensure continued or even increased support.

### Conclusion

A large segment of transitioning military knows where they plan to live when they leave the service, but there is nevertheless a significant share of service members that remain undecided when they start the transition process. These undecideds will consider many of the same factors—employment and educational opportunities, proximity to family, quality of life—that influence the decisions of people not connected to the military. However, they might also consider places that allow them to maximize the value of their military experience. As a result, they might also look for places that provide tax benefits for veterans or offer jobs or educational opportunities that allow them to leverage their military training. Many states compete to attract and retain these trained—and trainable—workers, but it is clear that no one state has it all figured out. Missouri is well positioned with many programs and benefits in place to attract, but other places show that more can be done.

Other state efforts show that several key principles that should inform Missouri's efforts to bolster its efforts to attract and retain transitioning military and their families. First, places should aspire to provide a 'Lighthouse in the Sea of Goodwill.' There is no shortage of available assistance but transitioning military may find the volume of information overwhelming. As a result, places the transition process by effectively and efficiently moving them into good employment or educational opportunities will have a better chance to keep them when they leave the service.

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Second, strategies that do not recognize and address issues and concerns facing military spouses are incomplete. Military spouses play critical roles in deciding where their families will settle into the civilian life. Their lived experience in different military communities will shape their impressions of those places. Consequently, they are more likely to consider staying, or returning to, places that gave them meaningful employment, quality schools, and opportunities to build civic and social networks.

Third, a competitive set of benefits, programs and support services can attract transitioning military and their families, but they will not have their desired impact if potential new residents do not know they are there. Therefore, states and communities must diligently promote themselves and continuously raise awareness of these programs and benefits. Moreover, these marketing and communication efforts must account for the diversity within the military community to achieve the maximum reach.

Missouri already has many appealing characteristics sought by transitioning military but moving forward it can strengthen its competitive position by focusing on several key issues. More active marketing will allow the state to raise its profile as a destination for transitioning military and military families. Missouri should follow the lead of states like Wisconsin and Indiana that have aggressively marketed opportunities in their respective states to transitioning military.

Since one of the motivations for attracting transitioning military is to grow and strengthen the state's workforce, Missouri should also prioritize efforts that connect transitioning military to relevant education and training programs. This will require building processes and systems that efficiently translate military learning and training into college credit and industry certifications. Missouri should look to emulate the Kansas' efforts for articulating military credit, as well as programs like Washington State's VIE-25 programs that connects transitioning service members to nearby certification programs.

Missouri must also continuously strive to create better conditions, and more opportunities, for military spouses. This may include expanding license transferability with other states or developing tools like the Alabama Mentorship-HUB that connects military spouses to resources and mentors. Additionally, Missouri should consider programs like the U.S. Chamber Foundation's Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zones to help organize local and state stakeholders around key issues affecting military families. Other strategies that merit consideration include creating labor market information tools to help service members better connect to employment opportunities, improving understanding amongst employers about how to recruit, hire and retain veteran, and leveraging local missions to attract veterans to the state (e.g., geospatial talent to St. Louis) or keep them here (e.g., construction, law enforcement).

While an expansive range of benefits and program is necessary, the state will benefit more by having a wide array of *effective* programs. Therefore, program evaluation and assessment must be incorporated into any new program. State government may take the lead on many of these efforts, but success will require the commitment, time, and resources from a broad coalition of employers, non-profits, educational institutions, and local governments. By working collaboratively, and with common purpose, Missourians can make Missouri one of the nation's most attractive destinations for veterans, transitioning military and their families.

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## Appendix

This report significantly draws on information gathered through Interviews with nearly 30 people from a variety of states and military communities from across the country. These interviews occurred between January and May 2022. The author thanks each of these experts for taking the time to share their knowledge, insight, and experience.

State	Name	Position	Organization
Alabama	Jennifer Holliday	Alabama Military Family Liaison	Alabama Military Stability Foundation
California	Summer Bales	Policy Coordinator, Defense, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee	San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce
Indiana	Blaine Zimmerman	President and CEO	InVets
Iowa	Jathan Chicoine	Home Base Iowa Program Manager for State and Strategic Initiatives	Iowa Workforce Development
Kansas	Scott Smathers	VP for Workforce Development	Kansas Board of Regents
Kansas	Tobias Wood	Associate Director for Career and Technical Education	Kansas Board of Regents
Kentucky	Dallas Kratzer	Cybersecurity and Workforce Development Outreach	Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs
Maine	Ron Morgan	Program Director	Boots2Roots
North Carolina	Kimberly Williams	Founder and CEO	NC4ME
North Dakota	Thomas Ford	Director of Administration	Grand Forks County
Texas	Randolph Binford	State Education Programs Supervisor	Texas Veterans Commission
Texas	Lori Stinson	Vice President, Military Affairs and Leadership Development	San Antonio Chamber of Commerce
Virginia	Leonard Remias	Military Affairs Liaison	City of Norfolk
Virginia	Shawn Avery	President and CEO	Hampton Roads Workforce Council
Virginia	Sultan Camp	Director, Hampton Roads Veterans Employment Centers	Hampton Roads Workforce Council

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<b>Virginia</b>	Amanda Slosson	Director of Strategic Development	Hampton Roads Workforce Council
<b>Washington</b>	Mark Sullivan	Planning and Strategy Manager	Washington State Military Transition and Readiness Council
<b>Washington, DC</b>	Matt Borron	Executive Director	Association of Defense Communities
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Rebecca Deschane	Vice President of Talent Development	New North, Inc.
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Steve Janke	CEO/Founder	Mission Wisconsin
<b>Nebraska</b>	Jeff Mikesell	Director, Military Affairs	Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce
<b>Missouri</b>	Tracy Brantner	Executive Director	Johnson County EDC
<b>Missouri</b>	Aimee Courtaway	Business and Talent Development Coordinator	Johnson County EDC
<b>Missouri</b>	Tammy Long	Vice President of Programs and Business Services	Missouri Chamber of Commerce
<b>Missouri</b>	Mitchell Fitzpatrick	Outreach and Training Coordinator	VetBiz
<b>Missouri</b>	Don Payne	Deputy Director	Sustainable Ozarks Partnership
<b>Missouri</b>	Samantha Dickey	Director of Strategic Initiatives & Projects	Missouri Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development
<b>Missouri</b>	Travis Lewis	Jobs for Veterans State Grant Program Coordinator	Missouri Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development
<b>Missouri</b>	Joe Driskill	Former Missouri Military Advocate	Missouri Department of Economic Development