

VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES

Perceptions and experiences of transitioning from military to civilian life



Foreword

With tens of thousands of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans returning from service and looking to start new careers in a challenging economic environment, the nation is focused more than ever on helping veterans transition into civilian careers.

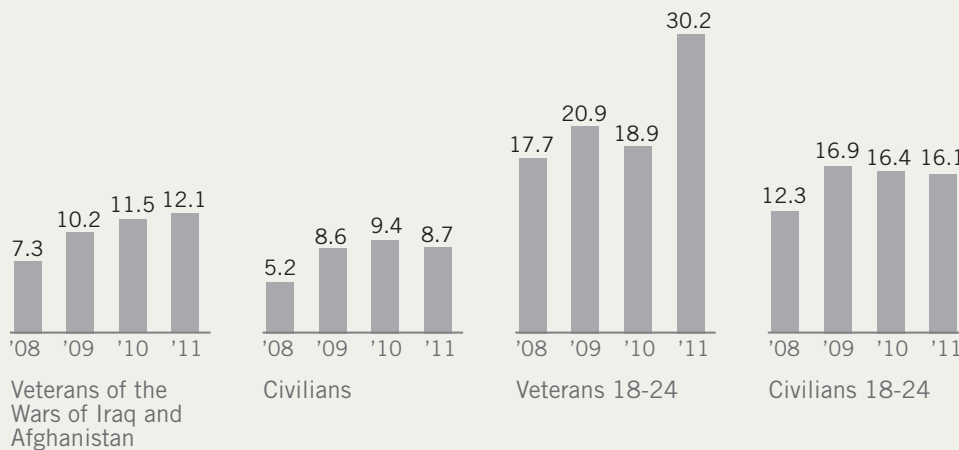
Veterans offer a unique set of skills, experiences and leadership abilities developed and honed during their years in the military and in the crucible of combat, yet unemployment rates highlight the difficulties returning veterans are facing in their search for new careers.

Working with the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America organization, Prudential conducted this survey to better understand veterans' experiences and perceptions around finding civilian careers. While veterans of all age groups were included in the sample, the large majority, and the focus of this research, are post-9/11 or Gulf War-era II veterans.

By shining a light on veterans' transition experience, this research serves as a source of actionable information for the range of programs—military, nonprofit and private sector—that support the goal of putting veterans on the path to employment, and ensuring that as a nation we continue to benefit from all that service members have to offer in their new careers.

Unemployment Rate *Total annual average percentage*

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics



For more detail on the methodology and respondent profile, please see page 10.

Summary

1. Two-thirds of veterans experienced a difficult transition from military to civilian life.

Close to half did not feel ready to transition. Difficulties are largely attributed to unemployment and health challenges, but also to the need for time to “figure out what’s next” or decompress after their service.

2. Veterans name “finding a job” as the greatest challenge in transitioning, with transferring military skills to a civilian environment a major hurdle.

Aside from the difficulties of the current job market, one of the greatest challenges veterans report in finding a job is explaining how their military skills translate to the civilian workforce. Nearly all believe they have the skills needed to land their ideal job, but the majority express concerns about how to translate their skills to a business environment.

3. Most feel their military service is respected by employers, but three in five veterans express concerns about cultural barriers.

Half are specifically concerned about employers not understanding military culture. Employed veterans are more likely to feel valued, while unemployed veterans are more likely to believe their experience is not respected nor understood by employers.

4. Two-thirds say they are facing a health challenge as a result of their military service.

Veterans who report a physical or mental health challenge have had more difficult transitions, show the highest need for support, and report greater employment concerns.

5. Not all veterans received support or training for transitioning to the civilian workforce.

Two-thirds said they received transition support. The primary source was the Transition Assistance Program, which less than half found effective.

6. About one in five veterans surveyed are unemployed and currently seeking employment.

Most job seekers say they are prepared to search for a job, but nearly just as many say they need more help with multiple job search skills. Veterans report that they need the most help with networking.

7. Job seekers report using multiple resources for trying to find employment, but show great interest in additional tools.

Interest is high in new transition programs or services customized for veterans, which close to three-quarters view as being important to their success.

8. There are high expectations for employer-provided support programs for veterans.

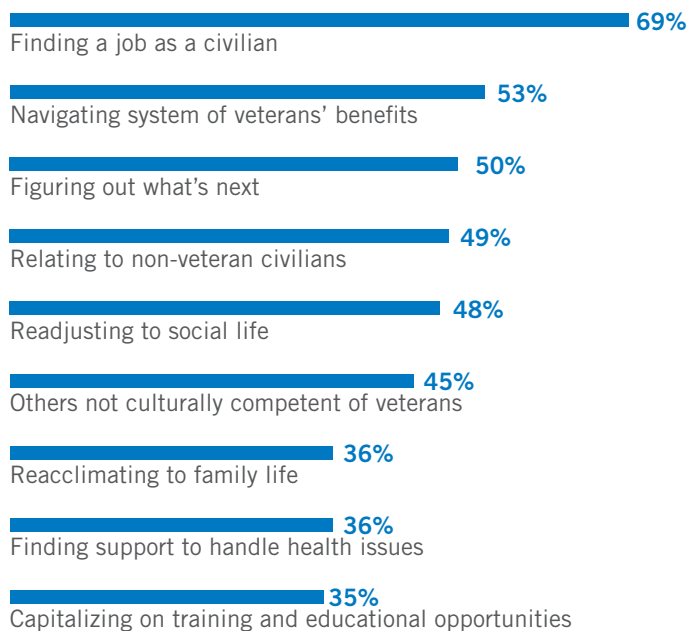
Veterans are looking to employers to not only nurture their career, but also support their transition to civilian life and accommodate any health challenges they might be facing.

Challenges Faced in Transition to Civilian Life

The majority of veterans describe their transition to civilian life as difficult, and name “finding a job” the greatest challenge

- Overall, 64% of respondents said they had a difficult transition from military service to civilian life. Difficulty is largely attributed to employment challenges. In fact, 86% of unemployed veterans said their experience was difficult, versus 53% of employed veterans.
- More than two-thirds of veterans consider “finding a job” as the greatest challenge in transitioning to civilian life (69%). Not surprisingly, most unemployed veterans report this as their greatest challenge (89%).
- The next greatest challenge for veterans is navigating the benefit and support system for veterans (53%), followed closely by the basic transitional steps of “figuring out what’s next” (50%) and readjusting to their social lives outside of the military (48%).
- Reservists and National Guardsmen, who are more accustomed to going on and off duty, rate their challenges similar to veterans not affiliated with the Reserve Component.

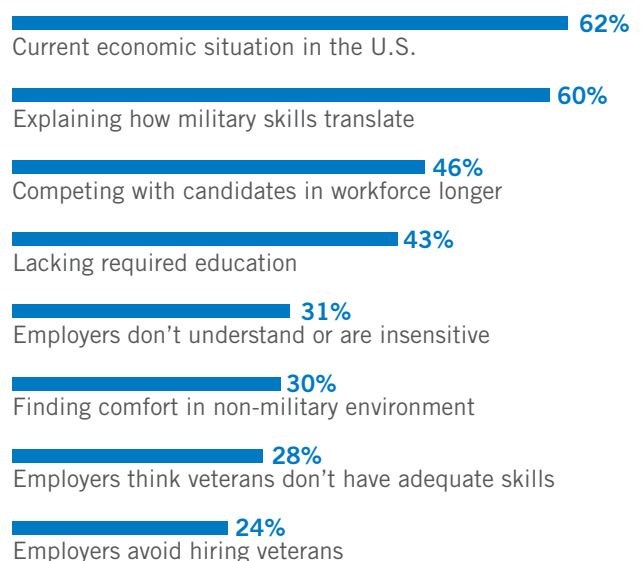
Greatest challenges in TRANSITIONING to civilian life



Translating military skills to civilian work is viewed as a roadblock to finding a job

- When asked about their greatest challenge in finding a job, veterans point to “the current economic situation in the U.S.” as the number one obstacle—recognizing that this macroeconomic issue magnifies the unique challenges that they are already facing.
- The next biggest challenge veterans name is explaining how their military experience translates to skills of interest to a civilian employer (60%). This is a consistent theme throughout the study in terms of being a barrier to employment.
- Veterans also see practical hurdles, such as “competing with candidates who have been in the workforce longer than me” (46%) and a lack of education (43%).
- Close to one in four believe that employers simply avoid hiring veterans (24%)—primarily due to concerns about multiple deployments or military training and time commitments of the Reserve Component, and fears of dealing with veterans’ disabilities or “too much baggage.”
- Virtually all veterans cite at least one challenge in seeking employment (98%), and two-thirds name three or more challenges (68%).

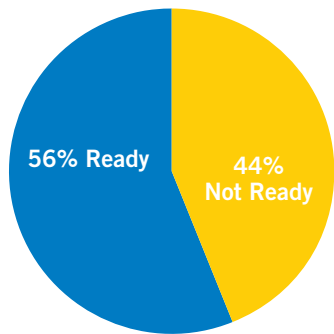
Greatest challenges in FINDING a job



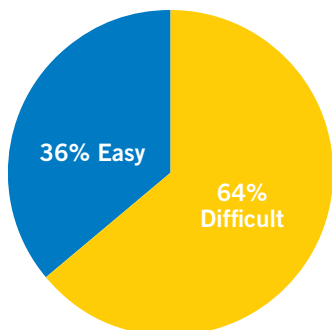
Close to half of veterans did not feel ready to transition from military service

- About half of veterans said they felt ready to transition to civilian life (56%), leaving close to half who were not (44%).
- Readiness to transition increases with education, but not necessarily by age. More significant is the presence of a health challenge. Veterans facing physical or mental health issues are twice as likely as healthy veterans to say they were “not ready” to transition (53% vs. 28%, respectively).
- Veterans deployed six or more times were somewhat less ready than their peers who had fewer deployments (52% vs. 43%). Role in service also has some impact—with the least ready from combat arms, protective services, and transportation, and the most ready from electronics, engineering, and administrative backgrounds.
- Veterans who stated they were “not ready” to transition generally reported higher transition concerns, were less prepared to search for a job, and were less likely to be employed.

Veterans who felt ready to transition to the civilian workforce



Ease of transition to civilian life

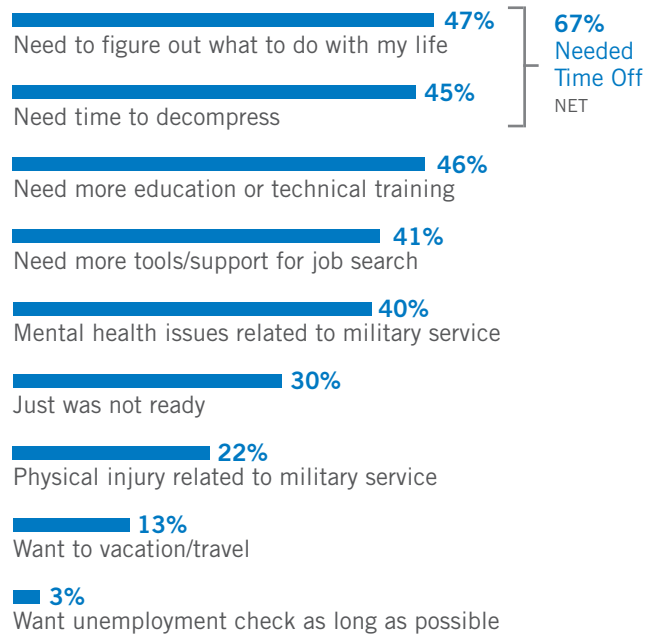


Those not ready to transition want and need time to decompress

- Among veterans who did not feel ready to transition, two-thirds indicated that they needed time to figure out what’s next or simply time to decompress.
- Close to half said they need more education, with younger veterans showing more of a need.
- Close to half also point to physical (22%) and/or mental (40%) health challenges as the reason for why they did not feel ready.
- Among those who did feel ready, 48% of respondents stated that family played a leading role in supporting their transition. Work experience prior to active duty was also considered helpful in their transition (39%), and is remarkably higher among veterans who served in the Reserve Component (50%).

Why veterans don’t feel ready for transition

Among veterans “not ready” to transition.

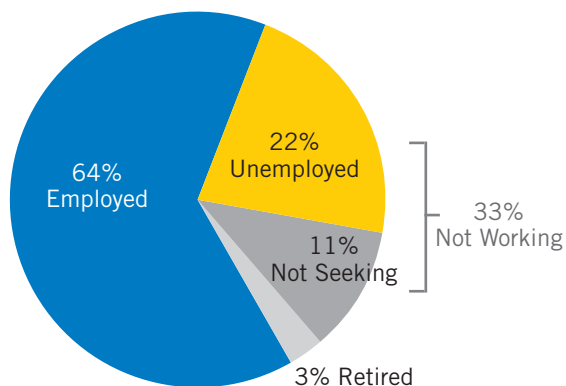


Perceived and Experienced Barriers to Employment

One in five veterans are unemployed

- Among the veterans surveyed, 64% are currently employed and 3% are retired. Meanwhile, 33% reported that they are not working, which includes a segment of veterans who are not seeking employment (11%), and those who are unemployed and seeking employment (22%).
- Employment varies by segment, with one of the most pronounced differences being by education—76% with an advanced degree are employed, versus 50% with a high school degree.
- Among those not seeking employment, 70% said they are students, 39% are disabled or focusing on rehabilitation, and 20% are frustrated or discouraged by the economy.
- Active-duty service members who expect to separate from the military within the year give similar reasons for not seeking employment, but the most popular reason was that they plan to wait until they are officially separated.

Veterans' self-reported employment status



Education is a priority for many

- 44% of veterans reported that they are either a full-time (30%) or part-time (14%) student. Among these students, two-thirds say they are using the Post-9/11 GI Bill.
- The student population rises among the unemployed (53%) and not seeking (70%) segments, both of which were more likely to name “lacking education” as a barrier to employment.
- Veterans have high educational aspirations; among those who only have a high school degree, three-quarters hope to achieve a college degree or more (74%).

Health challenges are pervasive and often lead to a more difficult transition

- In total, 65% of respondents reported that they are experiencing some kind of physical or mental health challenge as a result of their military service:

Physically disabled (33%)
 Recovering from injury (19%)
 Post-traumatic stress disorder (33%)
 Other psychological stress (31%)

- Data show that veterans with a health challenge have had more difficulty in transitioning to civilian life, including employment challenges:

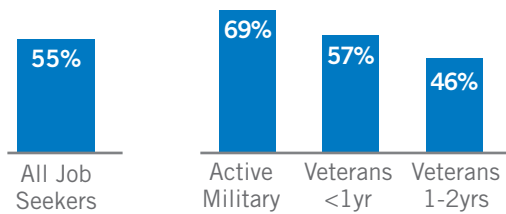
Impact of health challenges

Veterans with...	Health Challenge	NO Health Challenge
Difficult transition	72%	48%
“Not ready” to transition	53%	28%
Unemployed	23%	18%
Household income <\$50K	53%	40%

Most believe they have the skills to land a job, but expectations and readiness to search vary

- Nine in 10 job seekers believe they “definitely” (55%) or “somewhat” (35%) have the skills needed to land their ideal job. Veterans point to skills learned in the military that can be transferred to a civilian job—such as problem solving, leadership, ethics, and time management. Although less frequently, they also cite specific skills, such as information technology, health care, mechanical, and aviation.
- Nearly all job seekers feel prepared to search for a job (91%), with half “very prepared” (49%). Expectations and preparedness increase somewhat with age but more so with education.
- Active-duty service members are more confident than veterans in their skills and potential.

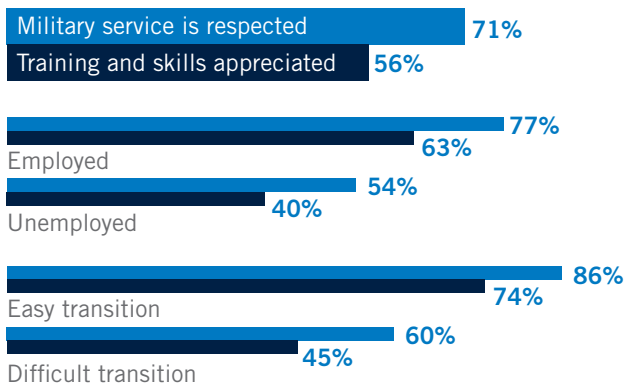
Job seekers who “definitely” believe they have the skills needed to land their ideal job



Perceptions of respect and appreciation waver by experience

- The majority feel their military service is respected by employers (71%), but fewer believe their skills and training are appreciated by employers (56%). Negative experiences drive lower perceptions on both counts.
- Active-duty service members are more likely to feel their service is respected and appreciated by employers.

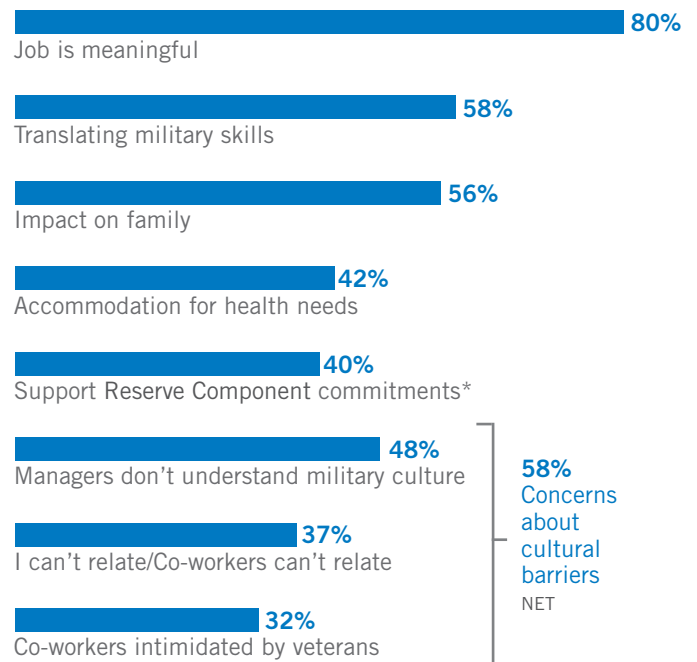
Perceived respect and appreciation of employers



Veterans express unique concerns about finding employment

- Veterans are most concerned about finding a job that is meaningful to them. After that, three in five worry about how to translate their military skills to a business environment (58%).
- Other high concerns include impact on family, accommodation for health needs, and support for any Reserve commitments they may have. So not only do they face anxiety about finding a job, but finding the right job.
- Half worry that non-veteran managers do not understand military culture (48%), and about a third feel non-veteran co-workers are intimidated by veterans (32%) or that they won’t be able to relate (37%). These concerns are significantly higher among those “not ready” to transition.

Concerns when looking for employment



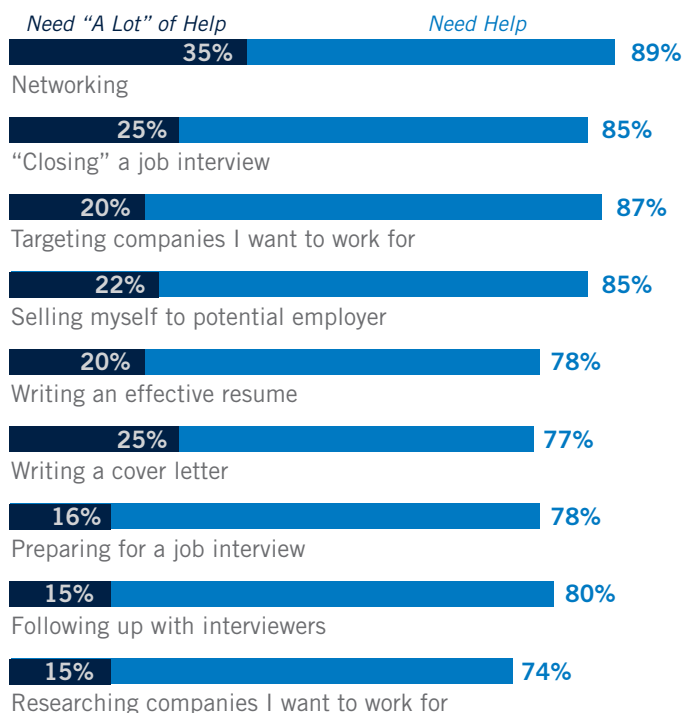
*Re-based to reflect only RC responses

Gaps and Opportunities for Support Programs

Job seekers are using multiple resources, but still say they need more help

- Overall, current unemployed job seekers report fairly high rates of using “job search” resources. Nearly half say they have used 10 or more resources (45%) in their job search, while just 8% have used less than five.
- Online services (91%), newspapers (72%), registering with online job boards (68%), and attending career fairs (61%) are among the most used.
- When probed on specific job search tasks, a large majority say they need help. On average, one in five confess to needing “a lot” of help. This includes help with resume writing, interview skills, and targeting the companies where they’d like to work. Veterans say they need the most help, however, with networking.
- Most job seekers believe in-person networking to be an effective tool (70%). Online networking, through either professional sites (52%) or social network sites (35%), follow in perceived effectiveness. Actual usage of these networking resources is lower than their perceived effectiveness.

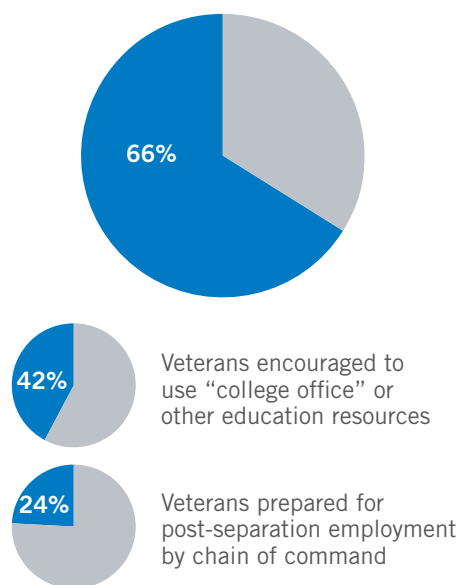
Specific needs of job seekers



Not all veterans received transition support; those who did had mixed experiences

- Overall, 66% of veterans indicated that they received some kind of support or training for transitioning to the civilian workforce—leaving a third (34%) who did not get any at all. Army veterans were almost twice as likely to not get training compared to Navy and Marines (41% vs. 22%).
- Only one-quarter said their chain of command prepared them for post-separation employment (24%), and four in 10 said they were encouraged to use the base/post command “college office” or educational resources (42%).
- The range of training is limited. While 55% of veterans attended a Transition Assistance Program (TAP) seminar, only 10% relied on a college career center, 7% used state or local government support programs, and 6% used the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) program.
- TAP seminar attendees gave the program lukewarm ratings, with less than half saying it helped them successfully reintegrate to civilian life (48%) or provided valuable employment assistance (48%).

Veterans who report receiving training or support for transitioning to civilian life



Veterans express strong interest in potential customized programs

- When presented ideas for additional programs or services customized for veterans, receptivity was high across the board. Generally speaking, receptivity was higher among the youngest veterans.
- More than half (53%) would be “very likely” to use a program that provided assistance in translating military skills to their civilian equivalents, which correlates with the high number of veterans naming this as a particularly challenging task.
- On average, in considering the ideas presented, close to three-quarters viewed potential programs as being important to their success.
- Overall, the data reveal that respondents would want and appreciate any additional help they can get.

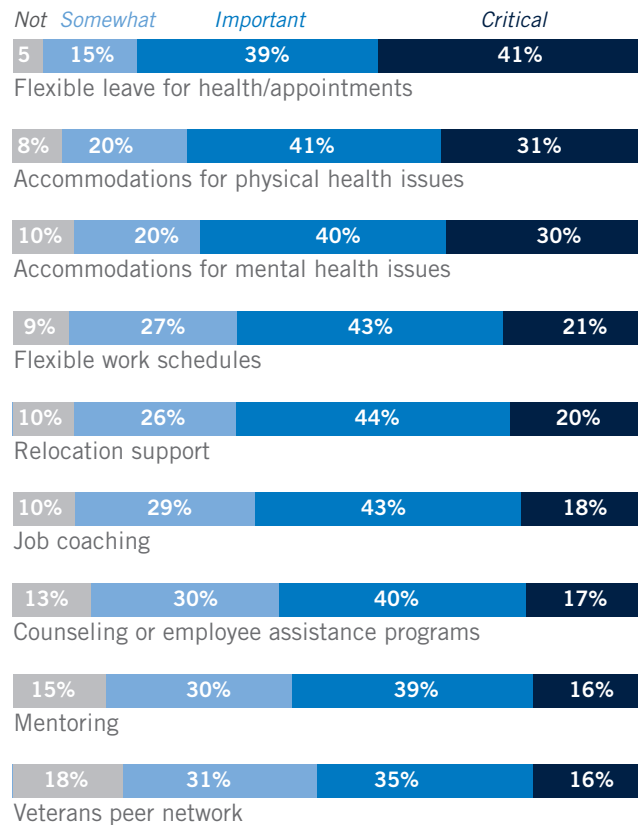
Veterans’ reactions to potential new programs

	<i>Very likely to use</i>	<i>Important to success</i>
A job bank targeted for veterans	61%	78%
Better access to college education, or technical training	54%	79%
Assistance in translating military skills to civilian equivalents	53%	79%
A program to help place veterans in internships	51%	73%
A program to help fund business dress, travel, relocation	51%	62%
Resume, cover letter and interviewing skills workshops	50%	80%
One-on-one career counseling	47%	70%
Certification and licensing translation counseling	46%	72%
A mentorship program with veteran mentors	45%	69%
A program to develop networking skills	39%	67%

Veterans have high expectations for employer-provided support programs

- Eight in 10 respondents feel it is important for employers to provide flexible leave for the health issues that veterans face (80%). This view is even higher among veterans who are actually facing a physical or mental health challenge (86%).
- Approximately two-thirds rated employer-provided veteran support programs as “critical” or “important” to their success. Few name any of the employer-provided support programs as “not so important.”
- Veterans are looking for employers to provide career opportunities, but also health and transition support. So to be considered a veteran-friendly corporation, at least some of these benefits and support services may need to exist.

Importance of employer-provided veteran support programs



About the Study

Research Objectives

This study explores the employment challenges faced by veterans. Specifically, the research was designed to gather insights on:

1. The challenges veterans face in transitioning from military to civilian life,
2. The perceived and experienced barriers to employment, and
3. Any gaps and opportunities that might exist for new or improved veteran support programs

Methodology

Prudential's study *Veterans' Employment Challenges* polled 2,453 veterans and soon-to-be veterans in an online survey from December 12, 2011, through January 23, 2012. The margin of error is $\pm 1.98\%$, at the 95% confidence level.

The study was designed to be inclusive of veterans from all service eras who met the following criteria:

- Veterans or Reserve Components who are inactive, individual ready reserve, inactive duty for training, or active duty operational support; or
- Active military or Reserve Components who plan to retire or separate from active duty within a year

Sampling

There are an estimated 21.6 million men and women in the United States who are veterans—individuals who have previously served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces and who are now civilians. While this study accepted a spectrum of veterans from all service eras, it should be noted that the sample was designed to weigh heavily on a sub-segment of the veteran population having served since 2001, also known as Gulf War-era II veterans, who are 2.4 million (11%) of the veteran population.*

The study's participants came from two sample sources:

- 1,018 surveys were completed by members of the e-Rewards Panel, which allowed for gathering a random sample of all veterans who met the criteria. (e-Rewards, Inc. is a global leader in digital data collection.)
- 1,435 surveys were completed by members of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America organization (IAVA). Partnering with the IAVA allowed for precisely targeting Gulf War-era II veterans.

After initial analysis, it was clear that, over the generations, veterans have indeed faced significant and common challenges in their reintegration to civilian life. The new generation of veterans, however, expressed higher concerns and greater challenges in their transition.

As such, this report was designed to focus on the 1,845 respondents who are Gulf War-era II veterans who served missions in the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan, such as Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Noble Eagle, and Operation New Dawn.

*Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Current Population Survey*.



Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) is the nation's first and largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to improving the lives of our newest veterans and their families. Through providing innovative health, education, employment and community programs, IAVA strives to build an empowered generation of veterans who provide sustainable leadership for our country and their local communities. Learn more, get involved and join the over 200,000 Member Veterans and Civilian Supporters now at www.IAVA.org.

Profile of respondents

Quotas were set to monitor for age, race, and gender against U.S. Census Bureau data as well as Department of Defense service member tracking data. All other segments fell out naturally from the random sampling.

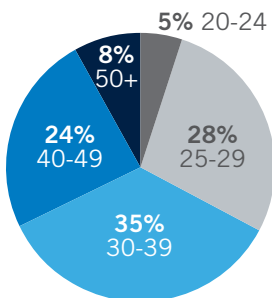
Half of the respondents represent veterans or active-duty service members who serve(d) in the Reserve Component (49%).

Below is a breakdown of the demographics of the 1,845 Gulf War-era II veterans included in this analysis.

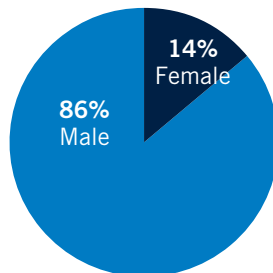
Overall Makeup of Sample



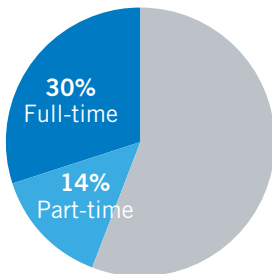
Age



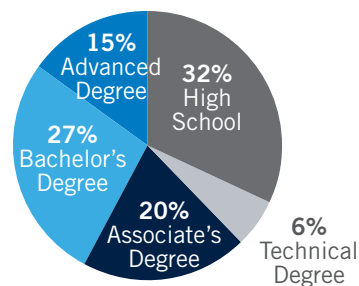
Gender



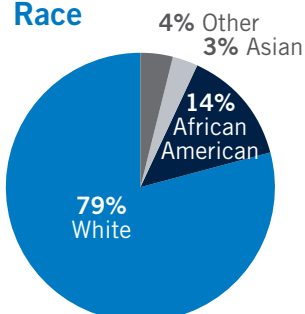
Student



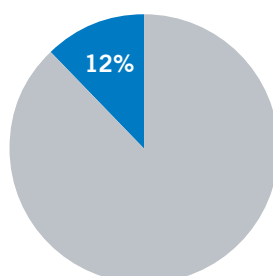
Education Completed




Race



Hispanic





This study provides new data that underscores the challenges many veterans face when transitioning to civilian careers.

It shows that while many veterans need some time after deployment to help them transition and take the next steps in their lives, getting the job they want in the current economic environment is their primary challenge. Military-related health challenges also have an impact on veterans' transition experience and their expectations of employer support.

Veterans surveyed view current training and transition support programs as not meeting their needs in many cases. Almost all are looking for or would value additional veteran support programs to help them transition back to civilian life, get them on the path to new careers, and assist them in translating their military skills into civilian roles.

Against this backdrop, among the many possible steps that could be considered to enhance veterans' transition experience, following are four ideas that may help address issues identified in this research:

- Build on existing training programs that help address the work experience and education gaps that may hinder younger veterans' transition into new careers.
- Strengthen existing programs or create new ones that focus on coaching veterans and hiring managers about how military skills relate or can be explained and adapted for civilian careers.
- Provide hiring managers with tools and education to help them understand the value proposition of veterans in the workforce and the benefit of developing and fostering veteran employee communities within an organization.
- Create job search “boot camps” that go beyond resume-writing to include interview skills, networking, and career/job research and sourcing techniques.