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## Introduction

There is much debate today on how to best provide care and holistic “Wrap around Services” for America’s Servicemen and Women, Veterans and Military Families. It is without doubt that there are an infinite number of organizations across the nation that provide support and services for our active and reserve component Military, their Families and Veterans from all generations. The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) has been chartered with the enormous task of “after” the service support and care since its establishment in 1930. The Department of Defense (DoD) has supported active service members since the Armed Forces were formed. Throughout recent military operations it has become apparent to consumers and administrators of these services that they are not scalable without the collaborative support from local communities, private, non-profit and public organizations building model partnerships with Federal, State and local organizations.

- The true expertise for success in civil life lies in our communities, not in the Departments of Defense or Veterans Affairs.

## Goals

- ☒ Engage community leaders to realize holistic community alliances. Challenging and grow the responsibility to influence unknown, unfulfilled gaps in “Wrap- Around Veteran Services” unite disparate efforts with the intent to fulfill vital Military and Veteran services
- ☒ Increasing public awareness, encouraging community leaders to become part of the solution, inspiring action and motivating multiple groups; governmental, non-profit, public and private to fill the gaps creating realistic frameworks and synergy amongst related efforts that already exist in our communities.
- ☒ Building long-term capacity for greatness, investing in human capital for the future of America. Encouraging and supporting Veteran to Veteran V2V™ community outreach opportunities and mentoring opportunities.

## Community

Communities are comprised of governmental, non-profit, private, public and educational organizations. Integral to continuing the investment that has already been made in America’s service members; is the establishment of unified partnerships amongst these public, private and educational organizations and businesses.

Community is central to the success of our transitioning service members, families and Veterans. The young men and women who are currently serving and those who have already made the transition have an enormous amount to offer the communities in which they live. As these Warriors and families evolve from the military culture; embrace their thought leadership, experiences, capabilities and resiliency. Recruit them and challenge them to maintain their

leadership roles as mentors and volunteers; to continue their service and grow communities as “Citizen Leaders or Public Service Warriors.”

## Education

Today more than any previous generation, access to education for active service members, their families and veterans is encouraged and made available in multiple environments to accommodate the needs of the student. Many colleges; graduate, undergraduate and vocational colleges are acknowledging there is an essential need for a central point where service members and veterans can meet, provide mentorship, peer support and camaraderie that is such a principal part of life in the military culture.

Evolving from the military culture compels change. The Veteran is adept to change; however not to the new culture. Educational institutions can in many situations be the first opportunities we have within the community to extend the goodwill that will inspire the progression from military service into a community. Many organizations identify this with "Wrap around Services.”

Educational institutions are often the first point of synergy in which it is critical to recognize the positive impact peer to peer or Veteran to Veteran (V2V)<sup>TM</sup> pairing offers in personally facilitating, advocating and administering successful futures. Recent studies have uncovered the growing need for utilizing innovative approaches such as Veteran peer to peer interaction in order to encourage and promote Veterans on the path of further education and continued success.

Washington State is the first state in the country to expound on the concept of National Service offering formalized and structured Veteran peer programs in colleges. There has been movement for establishment of deliberate key partnerships that are centered on the notion of enabling Veterans to perform a significant role in their own success while facilitating the success of their peers and the community in which they live. The following, are a few examples of dedicated partnerships amongst a growing segment of organizations committed to continuous education for Veterans through peer to peer and pairing opportunities:

1. The VetCorps; established by AmeriCorps and managed at the state level through the WA State Department of Veterans Affairs has 31 Members. Two members of the VetCorps are stationed at the Joint Base Lewis Mchord Warrior Transition Battalion; and 29 are in Educational Institutions across the state. Two of the members are military spouses; one spouse is a widow; and the other spouse married for 20 years to a current active duty service member who has served on multiple deployments. The personal impact that is made by the availability of a live person; a veteran that veterans can connect with cannot be underestimated. This personal impact translates to building a stronger community within the college and outside of the college. The small investment to maintain Veteran affinity groups, a place for them to meet and a community that offers a positive connection carries into the next phase of their lives when Veterans enter into the work force.
2. The Boys and Girls Club of South Puget Sound, led by a staff comprised of Veterans and Veteran Supporters, developed a Veteran teaming best-practice program by reaching out to local colleges and vocational schools in the community to offer efficacy roles for Veteran students.

The selected Veteran students are offered the opportunity to mentor children within their community at their local Boys and Girls Club. This mentorship program not only assists in

increasing the Veterans educational stability and enhancing their student life, but it also serves as a part-time job and offers potential internships for the Veterans during their tenure at school as well as the opportunity for mentorship from successful community leaders in areas of professional interest of the veteran student/employee. The current model for this program in Pierce County utilizes work-study funding as a holistic support services for Veterans in college. The connection for Veterans within the program and the impact and positive influence Veterans will have on the community because of their willingness to support and guide youth will prove to be invaluable in setting the foundation for community and generational success in the future.

## Employment

The current unemployment levels affect Americans of all diversity groups; none more than Veterans which uniquely encompass all nationalities and recognized diversity demographics. Today's focus is on supporting the challenges of a service member's ability to "translate" military experience and cultural backgrounds. The ability to do so has been erroneously undervalued. Moreover, the public's perceptions and the business world's understanding has been guided with dialogue regarding what does not "transfer" and the culture that is "dissimilar" as well as the "stigma" of hiring a Veteran rather than the positive capabilities and cultural competencies that are applicable to the "civilian world."

The "Evolution" (progression/development and advancement) from wearing a service uniform to entering the civilian workforce has recently been acknowledged by the Department of Defense as beginning up to one year prior to departing the active military. This step towards setting up the service member for a successful and seamless progression towards their next career path or continued education is applauded.

However, without the collaboration of the Department of Defense, Federal and State Departments of Veterans affairs pro-actively establishing an outcome based process that integrates communities, businesses, non-profits, and educational institutions teaming to provide a pathway and structure thru the progression; the process will be one more of challenge and discouragement than that of an enabler for the Service Member and Veteran.

The military culture is clearly unique. However, this acknowledgment is not to diminish the fact that the philosophy; the "ethos" is unable to evolve into the business world. Without question, employer's expectations are very similar to the expectations of military leadership; they expect their "employees/soldiers" to have the skills that fit the "job or mission," and they expect their "employees/soldiers" to add value to the business/mission.

Employers seek discipline, loyalty, ingenuity, integrity, strategy, and the ability to manage complex projects and programs under duress with expectations of high return on investment. From the day a service member puts on the uniform until the day he or she is honorably discharged; these are the fundamental traits that encompass each day they are standing guard.

Service members and Veterans who are seeking employment have expectations and goals that lead them to their pursuit of a new career. Fundamentally, these goals require a personal competency inventory to identify and access what military capabilities and cultural values "best-fit" in their new career field.

The expectation on the service members and Veterans from the civilian employer is to articulate these capabilities, skills, experiences, and cultural strengths in order to correspond and exceed business expectations.

Adding value to an organization is core to who a Veteran is. Teaching a veteran how to evolve, inventory their skills, articulate their capabilities and measure their competencies is at the center of gravity for answering the employers' needs and demands.

It is upon leaders of all sectors, Department of Defense, the Veterans Administrations, local communities, business leaders and educational institutions to change the dialogue from "how hard it is to translate military occupations and military culture" to how we can . The dialogue of "cultural indifference" is no longer acceptable.

- Call To Action is required to empower service members/Veterans with the ability to evolve and recognize their strengths in order to bring immediate value and capacity to the business world.

#### Keys to Success

Community: Building effective relationships between governmental, public, private and non-profit organizations that Refine and reduce obstacles within existing programs and processes for Veterans. Furthermore, embracing existing "traditional" services by promoting Veteran leadership roles in the community and focusing on recruiting and engaging veterans to participate and share their unique qualifications and experiences with fellow community members.

– Call to Action: Grow and Support non-traditional innovative solutions and shift strategies from the linear Veterans service and assistance program approach to a community outreach style, but offered in a single brick and mortar location; perhaps themed as a "Mall for America's Heroes." Exhibit 1

The "Mall" encompasses and represents multiple provider organizations available to offer the necessary real-time care and "Wrap-Around Services" for today's veterans and their families. This physical "touch point" located in the community to support a Veteran with a "One Stop" experience will undoubtedly inspire other Veterans to move forward as "Citizen Leaders" and become central to their community.

Education, higher education or a vocational school; is often the first opportunity for the "community" to get involved and assist in helping guide and recruit Veterans to schooling programs based upon their unique experiences and future aspirations. Recruit Veterans and encourage Veteran affinity groups on campus; provide them physical space to meet and funding to host events, and grow their network of professionals. Promote public awareness about the Veteran affinity groups on and off campus and how communities can get involved to support Veterans while they are furthering their education. Encourage community partnerships like the Boys and Girls clubs program that offer Veterans an opportunity to receive holistic support while concurrently giving back and positively influencing the youth in their community.

Employment: This is not about placing Veterans in jobs to check a box. This is about identifying

the potential for building careers and a good fit to provide a true value add to society and the Veteran. There requires an understanding that this process needs to begin in advance of service member's leaving their active duty roles. Raising this awareness and transforming the associated stigmas and negative dialogue from "how military service and cultures do not translate," to challenging employers to educate staffing teams and hiring managers on the cultural philosophies and competencies that are key differentiators among Veterans and add extreme value to a wide array of businesses and industries. Employers who seek the "top performers" for their organizations will understand how to recruit, onboard and retain Veterans.

A key ingredient to employers support is assistance in refining and analyzing the evolution from the Armed Services by engaging Veterans early in the process to take a personal inventory of their leadership capabilities, cultural competencies and offer interactive solutions to proactively assist with the transitioning service member.

Veteran 2 Veteran (V2V™): The impact of Veterans offering mentorship and peer support is invaluable and instrumental to the successful transition of countless service members across the country.

Innovative programs that recognize the value of recruiting seasoned Veteran talent that are actively transitioning from the service, spouses of service members and of the fallen who are seeking employment, Veterans who are enrolled in college, and experienced Veterans who have already evolved successfully and have become prominent members of the community can provide direct personal outcomes that ultimately build stronger communities and a stronger America.

Veterans bear with them an Ethos and a comradeship that is unparalleled among other affinities; and likewise offer skills that are invaluable to society. It is the communities' opportunity to offer the tools and gateway for these Veterans to continue their personal and community mission.

## Conclusion

In summary, the strain of over a decade of war-time has impacted not only the service members and their families, but also the service providers. Ensuring that we have a consistent and reliable network of champions from all levels of society; communicate, collaborate and begin to enact the vision of the Next Generation of how we collectively support our active service members, their families and veterans of all generations. These next steps are essential to creating opportunities for our Veterans leadership roles in communities across America.