



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT**

# Implementation Assessment of Executive Order 13518— The Veterans Employment Initiative

By the Institute for Veterans and Military Families



**PREPARED FOR THE U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | DECEMBER 2017



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## QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS

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## Employment of Veterans in the Federal Government

By the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including section 301 of title 3 of the United States Code, I hereby order as follows:

**Section 1. Policy.** Veterans have served and sacrificed in defense of our Nation. When they complete their service, we must do everything in our power to assist them in re-entering civilian life and finding employment. Government as well as private employers should play a prominent role in helping veterans who may be struggling to find jobs. As one of the Nation's leading employers, the Federal Government is in need of highly skilled individuals to meet agency staffing needs and to support mission objectives. Our veterans, who have benefited from training and development during their military service, possess a wide variety of skills and experiences, as well as the motivation for public service, that will help fulfill Federal agencies' staffing needs. It is therefore the policy of my Administration to enhance recruitment of and promote employment opportunities for veterans within the executive branch, consistent with merit system principles and veterans' preferences prescribed by law. The Federal Government will thereby help lead by example in promoting veterans' employment.

BARACK OBAMA  
THE WHITE HOUSE,  
November 9, 2009.





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

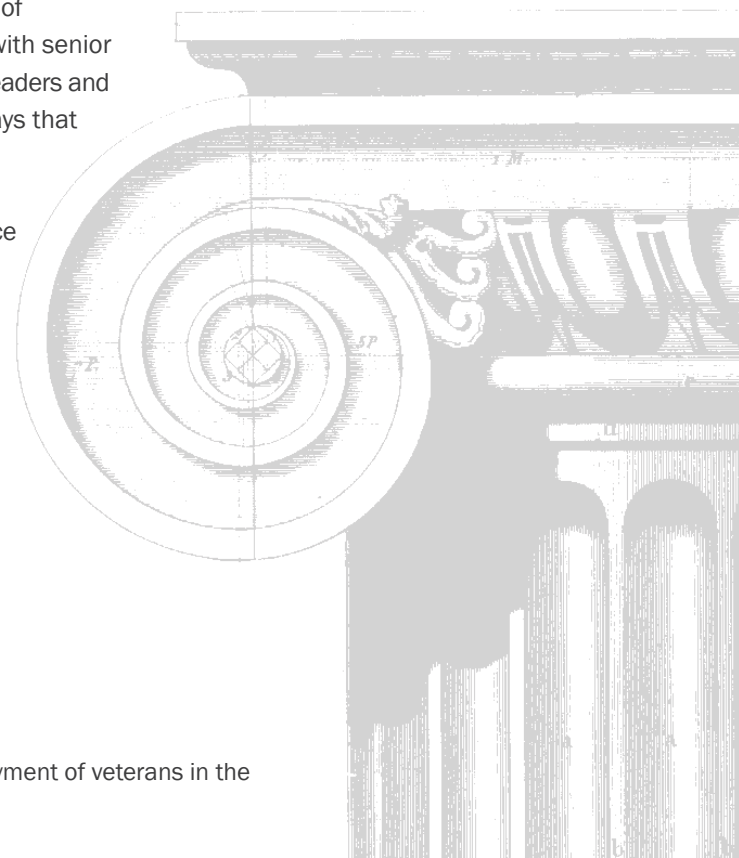
Various forms of preferential hiring of military veterans in the U.S. government date back to the Civil War. The most recent initiative, specified under Executive Order (EO) 13518 and signed by President Barack Obama on November 9, 2009, represents one of the most comprehensive efforts in U.S. history to improve federal employment opportunities for veterans. The order established the Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI), a comprehensive program to improve government-wide recruiting, use of applicable hiring authorities, and retention of veteran employees across federal departments and agencies.

This report documents the results of a yearlong, independent study to assess the policy implementation of the government's Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI). The study considers the initiative's efficacy and impact, identifies successful practices, strategies and opportunities for improvement. This assessment also offers recommendations to senior policymakers and agency leaders on how to best position the VEI for future success.

The study follows a multi-method research design involving analysis of government records, federal employment data, in-depth interviews with senior government officials, and targeted surveys of key human resource leaders and front-line hiring managers. The findings and recommendations offer ways that the current administration, the Council on Veterans Employment, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, and federal human resources professionals might guide future policy and actions that would advance veteran employment opportunities in the federal government.

“Recognizing the “prominent role” of government as “one of the Nation’s leading employers” alongside private industry, the order charged the federal government with helping “to lead by example in promoting veterans’ employment” (Executive Order No. 13518, 2009, p. 58533). The order acknowledges the federal government’s mission-critical staffing need for “highly skilled individuals,” of which veterans represent a ready-made talent pool, given their training, development, skills, experiences, and public service motivation (Executive Order No. 13518, 2009).”

**Photo:** President Barack Obama signs an executive order on the employment of veterans in the federal government Nov. 9, 2009 in the Oval Office.



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Findings from our assessment of the VEI reveal mainly positive outcomes for the federal government, as a whole, during the period examined. Veteran employment in the federal sector has risen sharply since the VEI's inception in 2009. To an extent, this can be attributed to the VEI initiative and its strong initial leadership. However, a deeper, agency-level examination of employment data, considered alongside primary data from two targeted surveys and select interviews of key insiders, agency Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCOs), and hiring managers, show more mixed performance in hiring, retention, and program implementation. There remains clear opportunity for improvement and increased inter-agency learning to sustain, if not enhance, the gains made since 2009. There is also widely expressed need to both simplify and further educate the broader workforce on rules and authorities pertaining to veteran hiring.

**NEED FOR SUSTAINED POLITICAL LEADERSHIP:** The VEI is governed by a Council on Veterans Employment, an interagency body comprised of the federal government's 24 largest departments and agencies. At its outset, the Council on Veterans Employment and the steering committee provided the initiative with strong, committed leadership required for implementing a program of such large scale and scope. Over time, however, progress and momentum toward achieving VEI goals waned due to inconsistent participation by senior-level officials.

**CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT:** In response to requirements in E.O 13518, OPM and the council instituted a government-wide performance measurement system. The system progressed from an initial emphasis on improving the number of veterans hired by each agency to a broader focus on employment concerns such as onboarding and metrics. In grouping agencies by size, the system also provided needed adjustments for agency differences in size, resources, and other factors that could bear on employment outcomes. Additional analysis and measurement design is needed to develop an integrated performance management system that integrates VEI strategic planning with a more comprehensive picture of agency-level progress on veteran employment goals (e.g., onboarding, retention, performance, and satisfaction).

**INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION:** The VEI facilitated existing cross-agency collaboration, particularly on veteran hiring and recruiting, and presents valuable opportunities to institutionalize informal collaborative efforts identified during the initiative's implementation. Despite much progress, more than half of chief human capital officers responding to our survey expressed that their agencies had found it at least somewhat difficult to collaborate under the VEI, highlighting the need for additional attention to this policy objective.

**STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION SHARING AND DATA ANALYSIS:** The Feds Hire Vets website provides a single source of information on hiring preference, the federal job application process, training, and associated resources to assist veterans, transitioning service members, their families, federal HR professionals, and hiring managers. In general, the federal government has been successful in providing a high level of e-government services. The collaborative nature of these systems provides new means of collaboration and engagement that were cost-prohibitive in the past. If feasible within budgetary constraints, designing and building technology platforms that support the VEI will serve as a valuable tool to further policy objectives.

**AGENCY-LEVEL PERCEPTIONS OF THE VEI AND VETERANS EMPLOYMENT:** Agencies perceived the VEI and the broader push to bolster veterans' employment with mixed views. They generally embraced the idea and the value of employing veterans but cited concerns including impacts on workforce diversity, conflict with other hiring priorities, and whether veterans could perform (or would even be attracted to) civilian roles and missions seen as unrelated to the military. OPM, in cooperation with the Council and agency heads, should formally address these concerns, as they are critical to the future trajectory of the VEI.

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**AGENCY IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VEI:** Implementation of the VEI proved strongest among large departments and agencies with more resources and a strong cultural affinity for hiring veterans—such as the departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security, and Labor. Smaller agencies with more specialized missions experienced greater difficulties. Upon close examination, Veterans Employment Program Offices (VEPOs)—offices that serve as a centerpiece of the VEI by coordinating human resource activities—show differences with program implementation. In general, large agencies maintain dedicated staffing and focus but smaller ones struggling to commit full-time resources.

**CHALLENGES WITH VETERAN EMPLOYMENT POLICIES:** While the VEI does not specifically address veterans preference and the broader set of authorities pertaining to hiring veterans, interviewees and survey respondents—from senior political appointees and agency Chief Human Capital Officers to hiring managers and individual veteran employees—expressed widespread dissatisfaction with the existing hiring rules, difficulty understanding and implementing the rules, and needs for change in policy.

**VETERAN SKILL ALIGNMENT:** The Council and Steering Committee identified the transferability of military-acquired skills to federal employment requirements as a top priority for the VEI. Addressing these concerns was a dominant theme expressed by the interviewees. The inherent complexity of this process, in practice, was a short-term impediment to the design and implementation of a formal process to address this need.

**PRIVATE-SECTOR ENGAGEMENT:** Drawing lessons learned from successful private-sector veteran hiring initiatives is an important component of strategic planning for the VEI. Public-private partnerships between federal agencies and the private sector have been successfully implemented through programs that address issues of social concern, providing strong precedent for cooperative relationships between the business community and federal agencies. Establishing continued access to hiring and career development opportunities is essential for the future of the VEI.

**CIVILIAN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRATION:** Existing research on civilian workforce development for veterans is not comprehensive. Expanding this component of the VEI will require additional research to examine the most effective way to harness cross-sector cooperation and share input over the specific objectives to be pursued.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL ON VETERANS EMPLOYMENT

- 1 Provide dedicated and sustained leadership to ensure that agency representatives possess the necessary authority to remain engaged with the goals and objectives identified by the Council.** Establish and maintain political support at the highest level possible—preferably the vice president. Designate an executive director to support the administrative management and supervision of the council’s activities.
- 2 In consultation with OPM and the Council, direct and oversee the development of a coordinated strategic planning process to address the findings and lessons learned that emerged from the implementation assessment.** Provide agency leaders with the resources and expertise needed to research, design, and implement an improved performance measurement system throughout the 24 agencies participating in the VEI.
- 3 To advance the strategic aims of the VEI, establish a formal outreach process with veteran employment coalitions such as the Department of Defense’s (DoD) Hiring Heroes Program, DoD Operation Warfighter, and the private sector’s Hiring Our Heroes and the Veteran Jobs Mission initiatives.** In consultation with OPM and the DoD, expand the DoD SkillBridge initiative to enable federal agencies to participate as employers. Provide training and internships to transitioning service members and take action to ensure that federal agencies participate in the initiative. Extract and apply lessons learned from the implementation assessment to determine how other federal initiatives (such as Transition GPS, DOL VETS, the DoD Hiring Heroes Program, and the VA’s economic communities initiative, vocational rehabilitation, and employment programs).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OPM AND HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS

- 1 In cooperation with the Council, OPM, and agency and department heads, consult with experts in the fields of industrial and organizational psychology, public management, and veteran-focused social science research to develop a strategic planning framework to achieve desired agency outcomes through innovation, learning, and workforce intelligence.** Continue to align and enhance the hiring, onboarding, and retention of veterans in accordance with the strategic planning process.
- 2 Develop a comprehensive plan to identify the most effective means to translate the military-acquired skills, education, and competencies of veterans for civilian employment.** Consult with vocational counselors, educational specialists, and human resources managers to provide employment pathways for transitioning service members and veterans. Address gaps with skills and education through military transition and federal career development programs.
- 3 Design a tailored, data-driven performance management system to guide goal setting, action steps, and resource allocation for the next phase of the VEI.** Connect the development of metrics and reporting procedures with organizational learning outcomes and VEI objectives developed through the strategic planning process. Measure performance against the entire employment picture (e.g., performance, job satisfaction, civil service tenure), not merely through statistics based on hiring, onboarding, and retention. If feasible within budgetary constraints, develop an information technology system for use by OPM and agency Veteran Employment Program Offices to support data analysis and reporting requirements.



- 4 Conduct a targeted assessment to determine how human resource professionals can address differing views related to civil-military culture within the workforce and how gaps in understanding and opinions may be impacting perceptions of fairness, diversity, and inclusion.** Reflecting a general trend within previous research findings, interviews with chief human capital officers reveal significant differences in views regarding hiring preference, special hiring authorities, and employment advantages for veterans. Data gathered from a survey of federal employees also reinforces this finding.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AGENCY AND DEPARTMENT HEADS

- 1 Identify key occupations, skills, licenses, and professional certifications that support agency-specific workforce needs and align them with established career skills programs and other established workforce readiness initiatives for transitioning military and veterans.** Provide job training opportunities and internships in cooperation with Council initiatives, DoD SkillBridge, DOL VETS, the VA Vocational Rehabilitation, or other federal programs for transitioning service members and veterans. Develop veterans counseling and training programs to focus on matching veterans' skills and aspirations to high-demand federal occupations projected to have heavy recruitment needs.
- 2 In cooperation with OPM and the Council, conduct assessments to identify human capital requirements in support of VEI strategic planning objectives.** Develop performance indicators to measure and evaluate core processes related to mission-critical needs and how to hire, retain, and develop veterans to meet those needs. Formalize and implement an agency-wide system to align performance measurement and evaluation procedures with workforce readiness, vocational alignment, and career development objectives.
- 3 Ensure VEPOs are fully staffed and resourced. Continue to identify learning and resource sharing opportunities with other VEPOs, particularly between well-resourced and under-resourced agencies.** Make use of veteran hiring authorities and the various flexibilities they afford to more effectively meet veteran employment objectives. Ensure that VEPO staffs are dedicated to identifying jobs that provide a good fit for veterans.
- 4 Ensure that agency heads and their deputies provide dedicated and sustained commitment to VEI requirements, including full participation in council and steering committee meetings, trainings, and internal veteran-related employment activities.** In cooperation with OPM and the Council, develop and maintain partnerships with other government agencies, veteran service organizations, colleges, universities, and private-sector institutions engaged with the VEI.
- 5 Conduct, in cooperation with OPM and the Council, an agency assessment of employee, managerial, and executive-level perceptions and knowledge gaps in current veteran employment policies and hiring preference rules.** Study participants expressed widespread dissatisfaction concerning regulations related to veterans' preference. HR professionals and senior-level agency leaders have also called for greater awareness and expertise of veteran hiring rules, compliance, and transparency.





## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF)

The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) is the first interdisciplinary national institute in higher education focused on the social, economic, education, and policy issues impacting veterans and their families. Through its professional staff and experts, the IVMF delivers leading programs in career, vocational, and entrepreneurship education and training, while also conducting actionable research, policy analysis, and program evaluations. The IVMF also supports communities through collective impact efforts that enhance delivery and access to services and care. The Institute, supported by a distinguished advisory board, along with public and private partners, is committed to advancing the lives of those who have served in America's armed forces and their families. For more information, **visit [ivmf.syracuse.edu](http://ivmf.syracuse.edu)**.

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