



Disabled Veterans Employment and Education

Gearing Up for Your Future

November, 2012

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Dedicated to those men and women who have served our Nation with honor.



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VetsFirst is a program of [United Spinal Association](http://www.unitedspinal.org), a nonprofit veterans' service organization recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

For more information about VetsFirst or to make a contribution, please visit www.vetsfirst.org.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Veterans who have disabilities often do not think of themselves as people with disabilities. Instead, most will quickly and proudly refer to themselves as a “disabled veteran” or a “wounded warrior.” Language matters when it comes to understanding all of the legal protections and entitlements, and accessing eligibility-based services and resources within the community. This is especially true when considering education or entering the workforce.

Whether you are newly injured or you acquired a disability many years ago, the way in which you deal with it may have a great impact on your future education and employment opportunities. Many veterans with significant disabilities have difficulty accepting the fact that they are not the same as they once were. Consider talking to someone who can help you find some perspective. This may be a fellow veteran, a counselor, or even a family member.

This Knowledge Book will provide you with a great deal of the information you will need to make educated and informed decisions regarding your academic and/or career future. It will focus on the basics of disability, both from a veteran standpoint and a civilian one; equip you with ideas and suggestions for creating a proactive plan for education and/or employment; and supply you with some very important resources, some of which may be unfamiliar to members of the veterans and military communities.

The information contained in this Knowledge Book is intended to be an overview that will help you find the resources you should connect with to guide you in participating in the civilian world of education or employment or both. It is not intended to give you the answers to all of your questions, but to encourage you to seek out answers, ask more questions, and make informed decisions. A series of basic objectives are presented at the beginning of each section and represent the critical points presented.

SECTION 2. CREATING YOUR PATH TO EMPLOYMENT

Regardless of whether or not the occupation you performed while in the military will translate easily to one in the civilian workforce, not all veterans choose the same type of occupation after their service. The transition to employment is like a road map. Unless you first define your destination, you're not likely to get there without a lot of luck. Thoughtful planning is a crucial element to career development, but not one often considered by most.

Section 2 Objectives:

- Learn a series of steps to help you prepare to enter the civilian workforce, as a veteran with a disability.
- Consider reasonable accommodations and whether or not (and how) to disclose your disability at work.
- Identify the multiple pathways to employment and the resources available for each.

2.1. Define Employment

An important precursor to defining your path to employment is considering what successful and productive employment might look like to *you*. For some, 40 hours per week is the desire, while for others part-time is preferred. If you are experiencing a long recovery and rehabilitation from a significant injury, you may still be in the process of trying to figure out what your mind and body can do again – and a series of work experiences might be beneficial. Whatever your definition it will probably change with time, experience, strength, and desire. The fact remains that being connected to the workforce (whether one hour per week or 60; in a paid or volunteer position; with or without supports) is strongly connected to how we define ourselves in society – and an important part of who we are.

2.2. Six Steps To Success

The six steps outlined here have been designed to help you create an informed path to employment. Steps 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 apply to veterans with and without disabilities. Step 5 is specifically geared to disabled veterans who may need reasonable accommodations, adjustments, or modifications to the workplace.

2.2.1. Step 1 – Try a Military Translator

Translating your military skills, experience, and training is an important step to finding career opportunities that best align with your capabilities. There are a number of online military translators that will do this work for you. By simply plugging your MOS, NEC, AFSC, rating, or

military job title into one of the many online translators, you will have the opportunity to see how your military experience may line up with jobs in the civilian workforce.

- Try [O*NET's military crosswalk](#), [My Next Move for Vets](#), or the military skills translator at the Department of Veterans Affairs' [VA for Vets](#).

The question you will need to ask yourself now is, “Does this job interest me?” If it does, you can move on to Step 2. If it doesn't, it might be helpful to take a quick interest inventory to get an idea of other types of work you might enjoy.

- [My Next Move for Vets](#) offers an online Interest Profiler – and it takes less than 10 minutes to complete.
- The VA for Vets online [Career Center](#) offers a series of assessments¹ in the areas of work experience, basic skills, work interest, math skills, perceptual speed and accuracy, language skills, and mechanical reasoning.
- VetJobs offers the [CRI Career Advisor](#), a behavioral/technical career assessment designed to measure the skills and traits of an individual relative to those required for success in a particular vocation.

Once you have a civilian job title (or two or three) that is of interest to you, you can move to Step Two.

2.2.2. Step 2 – Check Out Your Local Community

There is no sense moving forward in your job search if the types of jobs you are looking for don't exist in your local community. You can do this research in a number of ways. First, try entering a job title and zip code into one of the many job search engines available online ([Indeed](#), [Simply Hired](#), or [Job Central](#), for example). This will help you to quickly find out who is hiring for these positions in your community.

- Some websites will actually help you to search for specific jobs based on your military experience and desired location. Try the job search at [Military.com](#), [Veterans Job Bank](#), or [Hero2Hired](#).
- If you are interested in employment in the federal sector try [Mil2Fed](#), a military-to-federal jobs crosswalk created with funding from the U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service, available to all veterans regardless of location.

¹ Registration required to access assessments (email address and password).

- *Additional suggestions and job board links can be found in the [Employment Assistance](#) section of VetJobs.com, including the article [“How to Find a Job.”](#)*

Another way to get an idea of who is hiring in your local community is to call or visit a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialist at one of the thousands of [One Stop Career Centers](#) all over the country. The DVOP will have access to current labor market information and job descriptions from employers who are looking to hire veterans. You can find a DVOP in your local area by using the [DVOP Locator](#) – or you can call or email your [State’s Director of Employment and Training](#) and ask who in your community can be of assistance to you.

Once you’ve determined your desired occupation *and* that it exists in your local community, you will need to figure out if the position will be a good fit for you – and if you have the necessary qualifications.

2.2.3. Step 3 - Research and Discover – Is This Job a Good Fit For Me?

There are a number of ways to figure out if the civilian job you are interested in is a good fit for you. Good fit is much more than a skills match. Environment, company culture, personality, and temperament have just as much to do (and sometimes more) with a good job match as technical skills and qualifications do. There are a number of ways to research this information, both online and in person.

- *Southwest Airlines is known for hiring for attitude. In fact, Herb Kelleher, the company’s former CEO used to say, “we can change skill levels through training, but we can’t change attitude.”*
- *In 2012, Mark Murphy, author of [Hiring for Attitude](#) researched and tracked 20,000 new hires. Of the new hires that failed within the first 18 months of employment, 89% of the time it was for attitudinal reasons and only 11% of the time for a lack of skill.*

2.2.3.a. Research online

Try the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) and [O*NET](#). Both of these sources offer a great deal of job specific information, such as the details of the global job tasks required, educational requirements, physical requirements, credentials needed, and more. You will even find information about the personality characteristics or soft skills that tend to be a “good fit” for these positions.

2.2.3.b. Network

Networking is a critical piece of the job search puzzle – and one that the majority of the population tends to skip. Sitting at home and waiting for a job to come to you is a sure way to remain unemployed. The expression, “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know,” couldn’t be

more true. In fact, the majority of available jobs and open positions are not even advertised! These jobs are often referred to as the “hidden job market” – and can only be uncovered by networking.

Getting out there and meeting people is probably the best way to figure out if the job you think you want would be a good one for you. This will require effort on your part, though. You will need to make a list of people you know and people you want to know. And then you will need to reach out to them. You might explain that you are currently exploring careers and are trying to figure out if you’re on the right path – or you can let them know that you are searching for a job and would like to know if they have any potential connections for you. If you are interested in a particular industry or company, use these connections and try to find someone who can provide you with an informational interview (see below).

- *Consider creating a professional LinkedIn profile. LinkedIn allows you to search for people within a network and companies you may be interested in exploring. You can also join military-focused networking groups. More and more, today’s recruiters are using LinkedIn to search for new talent. You can view [LinkedIn’s veteran resource](#) page for more information.*
- *Military.com offers a [Veteran Career Network](#) where you can connect with other veterans who are working at companies or in locations you may be considering.*
- *Military network groups also exist on other social networking sites, such as Facebook and Yahoo! Groups, and may be worth consideration.*

2.2.3.c. The Informational Interview

An informational interview is a networking activity important to career development and career exploration. An informational interview is an interview with a person who is doing the kind of work in which you are interested. It is an excellent technique to use when you want to: explore different career options; learn more about certain occupations; and/or begin to network with people who can help you with your job search.

Although an effective job search tool, it’s very important to remember that the primary purpose of an informational interview is to obtain information, not a job. According to *Quintessential Careers*, one out of every 12 informational interviews results in a job offer. This is a remarkable number considering the fact that research also indicates that only one in every 200 resumes (some studies put the number even higher) will result in a job offer.

There are a number of ways to approach an informational interview. If you do an Internet search for “steps to an effective informational interview,” you will find some really terrific

information, tips, and strategies. Don't forget to follow-up with a thank you note. Be sure to mention the specific information you found particularly interesting or helpful. You can also let the person know that you appreciated his or her time and that the information provided will be valuable to you.

2.2.4. Step 4 – Structure Your Resume and Ace the Interview

Now that you have a clear idea of what you want to do and where you want to target your efforts, creating a resume that the civilian human resources world can understand is your next step. The resume is your foot in the door. The interview is what will get you the job.

2.2.4.a. The Resume

Years ago, you might have been able to have one resume that could be sent to multiple jobs, but today's job market is quite different. It is important to target your resume to a particular industry and a particular job. If you are considering two different career paths, you will need to have a series of different resumes. Creating the right resume for the right position is hard work and will definitely take time. But, this time is an investment in your future. Getting a job truly is hard work.

The purpose of your resume is to tell an employer what you can do for them. It should not offer a history of ALL of your experience – but the experience you have that is applicable to the job you are seeking. Steps 1 - 3 have helped you target a specific job, now it's time to tell an employer how your background and types of skills and experiences you have relate to the position for which you are applying.

- You can use this [resume profile template](#) to help you sort some of this out – or try the resume builder offered by VA for Vets in the online [Career Center](#).

Military resumes are historically difficult to understand for those not in the military. And, since most people have no idea what an NCO or an 11B is, finding ways to explain your extraordinary experience may be a challenge. Searching for key words in a job posting will help you not only decide if you have the skills and qualifications to do the job, it will help you to be sure a future employer can easily see this. The skills and experience you have that are not related to the job in question do not belong on the resume. This is often a difficult concept to grasp. You only want to include the information that will lead a potential employer to identify you as the candidate to interview.

Next, assume the person reading your resume has no connection to the military. Eliminate acronyms and military terms and use words and phrases that a civilian human resources professional will understand. These words and phrases can often be found right in the job

description. Show your resume to several non-military friends and ask them to point out terms they don't understand.

- *The U.S. Chamber of Commerce partnered with Toyota to develop some “personal branding” materials for veterans – helpful for both the resume and the interview. [Personal Branding Guides](#) are available as examples for a number of different military careers.*

2.2.4.b. Ace the Interview

Put yourself in the interviewer’s shoes and look at yourself in the mirror. Ask yourself, “Why should I hire you?” Remember, your resume is what will get you in the door – but it will not get you the job. Part of being ready for a job is preparing for an interview – and an interview is all about selling yourself. This may not seem easy because it feels like bragging or boasting. It will help you if you practice articulating your confidence in your ability to do the job for which you are interviewing. Take a look at the following statements and see if you can come up with answers to each:

- Three specific skills I have that relate to this career choice (or job) are...
- Three personality characteristics (or traits) I have that are related to this career are...
- Three interests or hobbies I have that are specifically related to this career choice are...

Using your networks (including family and friends) to practice interviewing will help you to feel more confident in your ability to talk about your experience and what you can offer to an employer. Practice answering the question, “Why should I hire you?” in a way that clearly articulates that you not only recognize the skills and capabilities necessary to get the job done, but that you *possess* these skills and the *desire* to do the job.

2.2.5. Step 5 – Considering Disability...To Disclose or Not To Disclose (Reasonable Accommodations)

Depending on your specific disability and how it impacts you on the job (if it does at all), it is important to give thought to sharing some of this information on the job so you can get the support you need to be successful. Reasonable accommodations are one way people with disabilities can be assured a “level playing ground” on the job. For example, if you have a mild brain injury and you are unable to focus on a speaker and write good notes at the same time, there is technology that can help you to do that. Accommodations are nothing more than incorporating strategies and tools to help you enhance your ability to produce.

Disability is not accommodated; it is the functional limitation you experience because of that disability that is accommodated. In keeping with the example above, a mild brain injury may

manifest itself differently in different people. One person may experience difficulty reading the words on a computer, while someone else might get headaches if working under bright lights. Therefore, it is important to think about how an accommodation might provide support for the *limitation* you are experiencing due to an illness or injury – not the injury or disability itself. For the person who experiences difficulty while reading the written word, your employer can install computer software that will read the words on the page. There is also software that will type as you speak. For the person who gets migraines or headaches from bright lights, ensuring that the work environment is suitably lit can be an easy solution.

What follows is a brief discussion about reasonable accommodations, what they are according to the law, and some examples of reasonable accommodations on the job.

2.2.5.a. Reasonable Accommodations

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination against qualified employees or job applicants on the basis of their disability. It covers all employment practices, including the job application process, hiring, advancement, compensation, training, firing, and all other conditions of employment. Under the ADA, employers cannot use eligibility standards or qualifications that unfairly screen out people with disabilities and cannot make speculative assumptions about a person's ability to do a job based on myths, fears, or stereotypes about employees with disabilities (such as unfounded concerns that hiring people with disabilities would mean increased insurance costs or excessive absenteeism or that veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are more likely to commit acts of violence in the workplace). *Section 5 of this Knowledge Book provides more information about the ADA and other laws impacting veterans in the workplace.*

Additionally, employers are required to make "reasonable accommodations" for employees with disabilities, which means changing the work environment or job duties to eliminate barriers that keep an individual from being able to perform the essential functions of the job.² Employers are not, however, required to make accommodations that would result in an "undue hardship," which means accommodations that would result in significant difficulty or expense. **What is important here is that an employer is *not required* to make an accommodation for an employee if the employer doesn't know the employee needs an accommodation.** This is very important for veterans (and others) with hidden disabilities, like PTSD, back injuries, mild traumatic brain injury, hearing loss, etc. It is up to you to decide whether to reveal the disability and request accommodations (if you're not sure how to do this, refer to the section on self-advocacy). If you don't need an accommodation, you don't need to disclose anything.

² Employers with fifteen or more employees must comply with these provisions.

But if you need an accommodation (or feel you would benefit from one to be as productive as possible), it is your responsibility to begin the discussion. This discussion should begin an [interactive process](#) for determining what you need.

Here are some examples of workplace reasonable accommodations:

- 1) Specialized equipment for a data-entry operator who has lost an arm, hand, or finger, such as a one-handed keyboard, a large-key keyboard, a touchpad, a trackball, or speech recognition software.
 - 2) Flexible scheduling so an employee with PTSD can attend counseling sessions or an employee with a spinal cord injury who has a lengthy personal care routine in the morning can start his or her workday later.
 - 3) Allowing a truck driver with a back impairment (who was limited in the time he could drive) to use a suspension seat and a vehicle cushion designed to reduce vibrations, so that he can comfortably sit for longer periods of time
 - 4) For an employee with a brain injury, reducing clutter and distractions, providing instructions and information in writing, breaking down complex assignments into small steps, or allowing a job coach on the worksite to help a new employee get settled into the job.
 - 5) Making sure materials and equipment are in easy reach for a factory worker who uses a wheelchair.
 - 6) Raising an office desk on blocks for a worker who uses a wheelchair, and making sure supplies, materials, and office machines are at a height that is easy to reach and use and are in a location that is not obstructed by partitions, wastebaskets, or other items.
 - 7) Allowing more frequent work breaks or providing backup coverage when an employee with PTSD needs to take a break.
 - 8) If the employer has an employee parking lot, reserving a parking space close to the entrance for an employee who has difficulty walking because of the loss of a leg.
 - 9) Providing instructions and information in writing for an employee with hearing loss.
 - 10) Allowing an employee to bring his or her service animal to work.
 - 11) Allowing an employee with tinnitus to play soft background music or sounds to help block out the ringing in his ears.
- *The [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#), a free service of the U.S. Department of Labor, provides confidential consulting services to individuals with disabilities, with regard to employment. Services include one-on-one consultation about job accommodation ideas, how to request and negotiate an accommodation, and your rights under the ADA. JAN representatives can be reached by phone, email, or web chat.*

- *If you are still on active duty, did you know that CAP (the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program) equips servicemembers with assistive technology devices, accommodations, and training to help individuals with dexterity impairments, cognitive difficulties, low vision, and hearing loss recover and transition to employment? CAP also provides accommodations for federal employees with disabilities. Contact the [CAP](#) office for more information or to request an assessment. A [CAP app](#) is also available for download.*

2.2.6. Step 6 - Reach Out for Support and Find a Mentor

Though you may be well on your way to finding a civilian career, you will probably encounter some potholes along the way. Part of creating your career planning road map is to identify some civilians that you know you can depend on. You should have no fewer than three people you can call at any time or connect with when you need them. These people may not have the specific answers to your questions, but will be there, as a sounding board, to help you search for the right answers. Reaching out to others (during the job search and at other times) is a skill that will serve you well as you continue to grow professionally.

A mentor can be an added bonus when in job search mode. Maybe someone you met during your informational interviewing is willing to spend some more time with you and help you to hone your resume, practice interviewing, or introduce you to people in your field of choice? You can also take advantage of other mentoring resources designed specifically for veterans.

- [American Corporate Partners](#) offers a free nationwide mentoring program for veterans who have served on active duty, in any branch of service, since 2001.
- [Military.com](#) offers a [Veterans Career Network](#) where you can find veterans working in companies, government agencies, career fields, industries, or locations that interest you – AND who are willing to help.

Remember – these people will not be looking for you. It is up to you to take responsibility to reach out to them. And, you will probably need to reach out more than once, twice, or three times to find the right person at the right time for what you need.

2.3. Federal Employment

A large number of veterans consider federal employment as a first thought during their civilian career search. Applying for jobs with the federal government takes time and patience. The majority of positions filled for federal service are done so using [USA Jobs](#). Veterans – both with and without disabilities – have additional avenues to explore and consider when thinking about employment in the federal sector. Disabled veterans are highly encouraged to explore and use

as many programs for which they are eligible . . . **including and especially those created specifically for people with disabilities.**

2.3.1. Veterans' Preference

Veterans' Preference gives eligible veterans priority in appointment over many other applicants in **federal** civilian employment. Veterans' Preference does not *guarantee* veterans a job, and it does not apply to internal agency actions such as promotions, transfers, reassignments, and reinstatements. The goal of Veterans' Preference is to provide a uniform method by which special consideration is given to qualified veterans seeking federal employment, not to place a veteran in every vacant federal job. It is a provision of preference in initial hiring and protection in reductions in force.

Veterans' Preference can be confusing [the law followed in federal civilian employment can be found in title 5, United States Code, Section 2108 ([5 USC 2108](#))]. Not all veterans are considered veterans for the purpose of federal civilian employment, and not *all* active duty service qualifies for Veterans' Preference. Only veterans discharged or released from active duty in the armed forces under honorable conditions are eligible for Veterans' Preference. This means you must have been discharged under an honorable or general discharge. If you are a "retired member of the Armed Forces" then you are *not* included in the definition of preference eligible unless you are a disabled veteran OR you retired below the rank of major or its equivalent.

- *For more information on the two types of preference eligibility (10-point and 5-point), please visit the [Veterans' Preference](#) section of [Feds Hire Vets](#). If you are not sure of your preference eligibility, visit the Department of Labor's [Veterans' Preference Advisor](#).*

State and local government employment may also offer a form of Veterans' Preference or priority consideration. It is recommended that you check with your state or local government careers page for specific information.

2.3.2. Special Hiring Authorities and Other Federal Initiatives for Veterans and Disabled Veterans

As a disabled veteran, there are multiple doors of potential entry to employment with the federal government. Some of these entryways are veteran-specific and others are disability-specific. **Job-seeking veterans with disabilities are encouraged to seek as many open doors as possible. Consider pursuing as many hiring authorities and preferences for which you are eligible.**

2.3.2.a. Special Hiring Authorities

The federal government has a series of [special hiring authorities](#) for veterans and people with disabilities. Knowing about these authorities and identifying your eligibility can definitely enhance your job search. While veterans are not entitled to a job under any of these authorities, they represent a few of many appointing authorities that agencies can use entirely at their discretion. [Veterans' Recruitment Appointment \(VRA\)](#); [Veterans Employment Opportunity Act of 1998, as amended \(VEOA\)](#); [30% or More Disabled Veteran](#); [Disabled Veterans Enrolled in a VA Training Program](#); and [Schedule A Appointing Authority](#).

2.3.2.b. Feds Hire Vets

Feds Hire Vets is the Office of Personnel Management's government-wide veterans employment website. Established under Executive Order #13518, Feds Hire Vets is a partnership with the Departments of Defense, Labor, Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security, and other federal agencies. The website offers up-to-date information for veteran job seekers, as well as an [agency directory](#) listing the 27 veterans employment program offices responsible for recruitment.

2.3.3.c. VA for Vets

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched the [VA for VETS](#) program in 2012. VA for Vets facilitates the reintegration, retention, and hiring of veteran employees at the VA – and offers career-search tools for veterans seeking employment at VA, career development services for our existing veterans, and coaching and reintegration support for military servicemembers.

2.4. Private Industry

Employment in the private sector is much less prescriptive than the federal or other government sectors. The most prominent obstacle you are likely to face will be in learning how to translate your experience in a way that makes you look attractive to a future employer. That means it is imperative that you do your research, understand the company, and pay particular attention to what a job description indicates the company is looking for – and targeting your resume for that specific position. Not an easy task – but in today's economy, only those whose resumes make it to the “top of the pile” will likely be the ones sought out for an interview. While most companies will tell you to apply online, some companies provide additional assistance during the recruitment and application process for veterans.

- The [Institute for Veterans and Military Families \(IVMF\)](#) recently released a [Guide to Leading Policies, Practices & Resources: Supporting the Employment of Veterans and Military Families](#). This guide is the product of a collaborative effort of the IVMF and more than 30 private sector employers and supporting organizations, plus many more, whose activities are reflected throughout the report, that agreed to share best practices,

lessons learned, and innovations tied to the recruitment, assimilation, retention, and advancement of vets in the workforce.

- *The U.S. Chamber of Commerce partnered with Toyota to develop some “personal branding” materials for veterans. [Personal Branding Guides](#) are available as examples for a number of different military careers.*

Private industry is much more than “corporate America.” It also includes nonprofit organizations and veteran service organizations – two industries often overlooked during the employment search.

- *[Idealist](#) is a website dedicated to connecting people with job opportunities, internships and volunteer opportunities, and more in the nonprofit sector.*
- *VetJobs provides a list of [niche job sites](#) to assist those who know the type of job or industry they are seeking, including the nonprofit industry.*

2.5. Self-Employment

There is a strong correlation between military service and starting a business, according to research from the Small Business Administration (SBA) Office of Advocacy. A recent study (2011) examined the level of [entrepreneurship among military veterans](#) and found that in the private sector workforce, veterans are at least 45% more likely than those with no active-duty military experience to be self-employed.

This isn’t to say that self-employment and entrepreneurship is for everyone – and it is certainly not an “easy” answer to career development. But, if you think you have what it takes to start your own business, it is certainly worth researching. A good place to start would be the SBA’s [Office of Veterans Business Development](#).

- *The [Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities](#) (EBV) offers cutting edge, experiential training in entrepreneurship and small business management to post-9/11 veterans with disabilities resulting from their service to our country. The EBV program is offered at eight universities – and there are courses designed for military families as well as female veterans.*

Franchise ownership is another option for veterans considering self-employment. According to the International Franchise Association (IFA), one out of every seven franchise businesses are owned and operated by veterans. IFA’s [VetFran](#) program helps returning servicemembers and disabled veterans access franchise opportunities through training, financial assistance, and industry support.

- *Additional information about self-employment and contracting requirements can be found on the [SBA](#) website.*

2.6. Volunteering and Internships

Finding a job or determining your career path will not happen over night. The worst thing you can do (and most people actually do it) is to simply apply for jobs and wait for that phone call or e-mail. Consider volunteering or interning for an organization in the field you hope to find a job. Not only will this give you the opportunity to “try on” a job, you can make a significant difference by offering your time and energy. In addition, a future employer will like the fact that you are doing *something*. According to CareerBuilder, 63% of hiring managers view volunteer work as relevant experience when evaluating a candidate.

Volunteer and internship opportunities offer you the chance to learn new skills, polish existing skills in a civilian setting, make new professional contacts (who can ultimately become references), and eliminate gaps in employment from your resume. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, employers offer jobs to 70% of their interns.

- *Often overlooked is the [Non-Paid Work Experience program](#) (NPWE) offered by VA’s VetSuccess program.³ The NPWE program offers eligible veterans and servicemembers an opportunity to obtain training and practical job experience concurrently – and may be established in federal, state, or local government agencies only.*
- *Look for volunteer opportunities in your local community. [United We Serve](#) offers a search engine where you can find volunteer opportunities in your local area.*
- *[The Mission Continues](#) challenges veterans to serve and lead in communities across the country through fellowships. Fellowships are 26 weeks in length and require about 20 hours per week (520 hours total), take place at nonprofit organizations within the community, and offer a cost-of-living stipend. You are encouraged to choose a fellowship location based on your personal passions.*
- *The [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) is working through [AmeriCorp](#) to actively engage [disabled veterans in national and community service](#). Full-time AmeriCorp volunteers receive a modest living allowance and an educational stipend.*
- *If you are injured, still on active duty, and in the rehabilitation and recovery process, consider an [Operation Warfighter](#) internship. Currently, internships are only available in federal agencies, though private sector internships are being explored. Internships are*

³ Additional transitional employment programs, including supported employment, can also be accessed through VetSuccess. All programs will require enrollment and eligibility.

flexibly scheduled around medical appointments and can range from a few hours a week to full-time.

2.7. Using the Resources That Exist to Help You

The only person responsible for finding you a job is you. That said, there are a number of resources available to help you in your search. Some offered by federal and state government, and others by community and faith-based organizations. Here are some suggestions:

- *Apply for VA employment services. The [Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment \(VR&E\) VetSuccess program](#) is authorized by Congress under Title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 31 (sometimes referred to as the Chapter 31 program). VR&E assists veterans with service-connected disabilities to prepare for, find, and keep suitable jobs. For veterans with service-connected disabilities so severe that they cannot immediately consider work, VR&E offers services to improve their ability to live as independently as possible.*
- *Search on your state's [Department of Labor](#) and/or [Veterans Affairs](#) website for additional benefits and resources available to you.*
- *Talk to people at your place of worship – many faith-based organizations are finding ways to give back to veterans of all eras by providing employment assistance.*
- *Check out the [National Resource Directory](#) to find additional federal, state, and local employment resources.*
- *Review [Google for Veterans](#), which was created with the understanding of the challenges of serving, coming home, and transitioning to civilian life. Free Google products and tools are available.*
- *Visit your local [Career One Stop](#), which offers several resources and services available to veterans and servicemembers with service-connected disabilities.*

Part of your mission is to find out what is out there that can be of help to you. Keep a notebook with the names of people you meet or programs that seem interesting. The number of potential resources available may be overwhelming. But if you do your homework and ask questions along the way, you will be sure to find the answers you need to create the path to employment that is right for you.

SECTION 3. CHOOSING SCHOOL AS A PATH TO EMPLOYMENT

Veterans of all ages are choosing education as a path to employment. Some decide on education for additional training or certifications needed for a specific career field, others because they want to do something totally different than what they had trained for while in the military or because of the employment outlook in today's economy. Whatever the reason, colleges and universities are becoming better acclimated with the needs of student veterans. Many are stepping up to the plate to create veterans programs where they didn't exist before, or are providing additional services based on the needs of their current veteran and military family population. This section will explore different strategies for helping you to make an informed decision regarding the post-secondary education that is right for you.

Section 3 Objectives:

- Identify the important factors to consider before selecting a school.
- Discover the resources available to you as a student veteran and as a student with a disability.
- Learn the range of accommodations available to help you succeed at school as a student veteran with a disability.

3.1. Research . . . Research . . . Research

Think about buying a car. Would you buy the first car you saw because it looked the shiniest? Or would you give it a test drive . . . maybe kick the tires . . . check out some online reviews . . . maybe talk to some friends? Deciding on a university, community college, or technical school should be no different. There are a number of schools that might “look shiny” on the outside, but once you check under the hood, you may find out that it's a lemon. There are a number of different strategies you can and should consider while looking for a school. Don't be swayed by a designation of “military or veteran friendly.” In 2012, Student Veterans of America (SVA) suspended chapters at 40 for-profit colleges, alleging that the colleges set them up as “shell organizations to help them appeal to veteran students who carry lucrative government tuition benefits.” Whether you choose a community college, an online school, or a member of the Ivy League, take the time to make sure that you're making the best decision for you, your needs, and if you have a family, the needs of your family.

3.1.1. Create Your Own Definition of “Veteran-Friendly”

The definition of “veteran-friendly” is as diverse as today’s higher education community. Factors such as campus culture, academic environment, student body size and composition, location, and more all play a role in what programs and services might characterize “veteran-friendly.” While there are a number of different resources that list “military- or veteran-friendly” institutions, you will need to determine if a particular school is right for you. After all, all veterans have different needs – and what might be “veteran-friendly” to one, might be “not-so-veteran-friendly” to another. What really matters is what matters to *you* as an incoming student, a student veteran, and a student with a disability.

- [*Today’s GI Bill*](#) suggests you first identify your priorities and then carefully research the characteristics of a range of schools before determining a match. A number of resources and questions to ask yourself are also available on its website.

3.1.2. Carefully Examine the School’s Website

Check out the school’s website to see if they provide additional assistance to student veterans. If it’s not clearly labeled on the main page, search for “veterans” in the search bar. If you cannot find anything, it is likely that the institution does not provide special services for student veterans. If you are using your Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits to return to school, it will be critical that you connect with a VA Certifying Official. Without this individual and the knowledge they bring, your chances of using your benefits efficiently and effectively will be hampered greatly.

3.1.3. Find Out How Your Military Transcripts Translate to Coursework

Your official military transcripts are a key element to your admission package. In many cases, veterans may have academic credits to transfer from military transcripts and the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) that can affect admissions decisions, class status, and more. Look for the school’s policy for evaluating military credits. If you are not sure if and how your credits will transfer, you can check out the American Council on Education’s (ACE) online [Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services](#). This document will help you to better understand how college credit for military training is awarded. If you are deciding between schools, find out which school can offer you the most credits, because this will vary.

3.1.4. Review the School’s Policies

There are a number of policy issues that relate specifically to student veterans. These include, but are not limited to: entrance exams, transcript review, deferral and readmission (most notably for National Guard and Reserve Members), transfer, residency, early registration, and withdrawal. Be certain to review the school’s written policies, which should clearly articulate how these policies may affect you as a student veteran in general.

If you are continuing your service in the National Guard or Reserves, this information will be especially important to you (related to monthly drills or a possible deployment). You want to be certain you know the school's policies and procedures so you don't lose time or credit for military leave.

3.2. Be an Informed Consumer: Spend Your GI Bill Benefits Wisely

Even though the school's VA Certifying Official should be able to answer your questions regarding your GI Bill Benefits – it is important for you to have an understanding of what your benefits are and how you can use them. No two veterans have the same careers, experiences, or military incentives afforded to them. Whether you are using the Post 9/11 GI Bill, the Montgomery GI Bill, or another VA benefits program, gaining an understanding about your benefits is important.

In October 2011, significant changes were made to the Post 9/11 GI Bill, which added some flexibility and new benefits. You may qualify for increased payment rates, housing stipends if an online student, book stipends, support for apprenticeship programs, and more. It will be important for you to compare schools to find the one that best meets your needs when using your benefits. Having more options for GI Bill benefits is great, but will require you to do additional research to be sure you are making the best decision for you.

- [Post 9/11 GI Bill Benefits](#) are more flexible than ever before – and can apply to more than the typical academic education (e.g., community college or a traditional four-year university). [Apprenticeship training](#) (for jobs like machinist or baker); [on-the-job training](#) (for jobs like firefighter or hotel management), and [non-college degree programs](#) (for certifications necessary to be a truck driver or an emergency medical technician, for example) are now possible.

Take the time to ask questions. These are benefits you have earned and have more flexibility than ever before. But once they are gone . . . they are gone.

- Some resources to help you explore your GI Bill Benefits include: [Today's GI Bill](#), IAVA's [GI Bill Benefits Calculator](#), and the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#).

3.3. Assess Your Needs– BOTH as a Veteran *and* as a Student With a Disability

All schools offer support and resources to their student population, but these supports and resources are not created equal. You will need to spend some time assessing yourself and your needs – both in terms of academics and general student-service areas – and determine the school that best meets your needs. Some things to research might be the availability of academic tutoring, whether or not the school has veteran-only courses (if that is of interest to

you), the reasonable accommodations process, health (including mental health) services, and career services.

3.3.1. Academic Tutoring

Many military students, upon entering college or other postsecondary institutions, find they may need tutoring and/or additional educational support outside the classroom. Many schools across the country are developing tutoring programs designed specifically for student veterans. Some schools will offer priority registration for student veterans who sign up for weekly tutoring sessions. Even if you are not sure you will need tutoring, find out what services exist, just in case. If you need more intensive tutoring services, you may be eligible to receive additional assistance from the VA to defray these costs. Tutoring can often be the missing link between dropping out and graduating.

3.3.2. Veteran-Only Courses

To help ensure that student veterans get off on the right foot when beginning the college experience, many schools are beginning to offer courses and programs specifically designed for veterans. Coursework can range anywhere from a one credit “introduction to the college experience” (where issues such as transition, leveraging benefits, and disability are discussed) to general requirement classes such as government/history, English, and math.

Servicemembers who attend college after leaving the military often report difficulty interacting with people who don’t understand their experiences. Veteran-only classes can help students become well acclimated to college life. Schools are starting to provide these courses because they have heard that “fitting in” on campus is an important consideration for student veterans. Additionally, veteran-only courses often offer the camaraderie veterans miss – and may likely translate into more positive experiences throughout a college career.

3.3.3. Accommodations

If you are returning to or entering college for the first time and have a newly acquired injury (physical or psychological health-related), you may have no idea if or how your ability to learn may have changed. This will be especially true if you did not experience any learning difficulties prior to your military service. Additionally, a veteran may be discharged from the military without realizing that she or he has experienced a significant learning or memory-related impairment, since a true diagnosis of post-traumatic-stress disorder, and in some cases a mild traumatic brain injury, can occur after the separation from service.

This is compounded by the fact that most student veterans will not identify as a “person with a disability” and are probably unfamiliar with reasonable accommodations and how to access them. While the document [Accommodating Student Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury and](#)

[Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#) was written for campus staff and faculty, it is definitely a worthwhile read for student veterans.

If you are experiencing learning challenges in the classroom – or are fearful you might – make it a point to meet with your professors or a veterans support representative at your school. All schools have an office called Academic Support Services, Disability Support Services, or something similar – and their job is to ensure that accommodations to the learning environment are put in place to help students with disabilities (including student veterans⁴) succeed in the classroom.

Examples of some common accommodations provided to students with disabilities in the classroom include, but are not limited to:

- *Priority course enrollment*
- *Screen reading software programs or other special computer equipment*
- *Alternate formats for textbooks or other course material (e.g., books on CD)*
- *Extended time, readers, and/or scribes for exam taking*
- *Reduced distraction environment for exams*
- *Sign Language interpreting*
- *Computer Assisted Realtime Transcription (CART)*
- *Captioning of video material*
- *Peer note taking assistance*
- *FM systems (assistive amplification device) for lectures*
- *Preferential seating*
- *Use of word processor for exams requiring significant writing*
- *Considerations of alternate courses for foreign language requirement*
- *Permission to tape record classes*
- *Modification of seating, furniture, or class location to ensure access*

3.3.4. Health and Mental Health Services

College can be a stressful time for many students – but student veterans are more likely to be juggling academic work, home/family life, and a job all at the same time. While some of these struggles are not unlike what other non-traditional or adult students may be facing, veterans may be dealing with additional issues very much unlike their peers. While colleges and universities typically offer a wide variety of health and mental health services for their student populations (stress, anxiety, and depression are common issues), many schools are partnering

⁴ To be eligible for academic accommodations, you will need to provide proof of disability and make a formal request. If you're unsure how to do this, you can contact the school's Veteran Service Officer.

with the VA and local Vet Centers for additional veteran-focused medical and mental health services.

Similar to the disability services discussed above, whether or not you think you need these services, it is your responsibility to find out what they are and where they are. Maybe you won't need these services, but a fellow veteran student may need help. Expand your knowledge about the health-related offerings on campus – and who to contact.

3.3.5. Career Services

While it is not the responsibility of a university's career center to provide job placement services or make employment or career promises, it is generally understood and expected that networking opportunities and internship possibilities will be offered and promoted. That said, it is your responsibility to find out where the career center is located, find out what services they offer, and use these services to help you stand out. Networking classes are often offered, as are classes in resume development, interviewing skills, and more. University alumni often remain very committed and connected to the school – and can be a terrific source for job leads.

3.3.5.a. Consider a VA Work Study

Eligible veterans, either full- or 3/4-time students in a degree, vocational, or professional program, can take advantage of a [VA Work-Study Program](#), often referred to as an “Earn While You Learn” program. This program is designed to assist you (and the institution) both financially and professionally. Work performed must be related to the VA and can include, but is not limited to:

- Processing VA paperwork at schools or VA offices;
- Performing outreach services on campus, under the supervision of a VA employee;
- Performing services at VA medical facilities, other VA offices or state employment offices;
- Working in veterans admissions, GI Bill matters and/or as a peer navigator; or
- Making phone calls, sending emails, and welcoming new students to campus.

Most importantly, the work completed can be linked to your interests and abilities, and, of course, the type of work needed by the institution. The VA Work-Study Program allows for creative, fulfilling, and meaningful experiences for you – and provides the institution with a knowledgeable and committed employee (you) for the institution.

3.4. Visit and Ask Questions

Student organizations, in general, tend to provide a vehicle for students with similar interests to organize. Student veteran organizations on campus can help veterans to connect with each other – and can offer advice on the transition from the military to campus and from campus to

career. If connecting with other student veterans through a student veteran organization is important to you, be sure to include this research as you search for the school that is right for you. You may find this in a large organization, such as [SVA](#) with chapters all over the country, or a small group of interested and committed students on campus.

If you are considering pursuing your education in an online environment, ask yourself the following questions (and be honest with your answers):

- *Am I comfortable on the computer and on the Internet?*
- *Do I have the time to commit to an online course?*
- *Am I a good manager of my time?*
- *Am I a self-motivated student?*

If you can't say with certainty that an online education will be the best fit for you, talk with the school's admissions coordinator. Find out if there is an elective class or maybe even an "introduction to college for veterans" class you can take.

SECTION 4. UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINING DISABILITY

The term disability has different meanings in different contexts. Historically, disability in the Department of Defense has been viewed as the end of an active duty career (though this is changing). The Department of Veterans Affairs correlates disability as a way to determine benefits and compensation. In civilian education and employment, disability is considered a legal term that is used to determine *eligibility* for academic and workplace accommodations, special hiring initiatives, and protection against discrimination.

Disabled veterans often consider only those laws and regulations that are “veteran-specific” to be applicable to their individual circumstances. While the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), Veterans’ Preference Act, and Vietnam Era Veteran’s Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA) are critically important to know about and understand, they are not the only laws that apply to and impact veterans seeking employment and education.

This section will highlight the different and unique aspects and definitions of disability and will put into context the need for veterans who have disabilities to understand the advantages and potential disadvantages of identifying as a “person with a disability,” as well as a disabled veteran, in education and employment.

Section 4 Objectives:

- Discover why a disabled veteran may choose to also distinguish him/herself as a person with a disability.
- Learn the laws and protections afforded to you as a disabled veteran and as a person with a disability.
- Understand how federal hiring preferences apply to disabled veterans and to people with disabilities.

4.1 Why Understanding Disability Matters

Due to advances in military medicine and protective equipment, increased numbers of today’s servicemembers are surviving the injuries they sustain on the battlefield. However, the changing combat landscape has created a shift in the type and range of injuries experienced.

Though the injuries and subsequent disabilities experienced by servicemembers of any era include those that are visible to others, such as limb/multiple limb loss or severe burns, many are not. Some of the other common injuries associated with military service include a number of those that cannot be seen or easily recognized by someone else, such as back injuries, hearing loss, post-traumatic stress disorder, and mild traumatic brain injury, to name a few. These “unseen” injuries/disabilities are no less significant than those disabilities that are visible. In fact, it is the non-visible injuries that can often cause more confusion and distress to servicemembers, because they are not as easily understood.

- *If others can't “see” your injury or disability, they are less likely to know what you might need to be successful. Disclosure is an important aspect of understanding disability – and will be addressed at different points in this Knowledge Book. For example, if you are a wheelchair user, it should be obvious that you will need access to the building (ramp) and to an office or classroom that might be on the third floor (elevator). If you have acquired a learning disability or a traumatic brain injury, your needs will likely not be obvious to those around you and it will be up to you to let them know how you learn best and what you need to be successful.*

It is important for you to take the time to fully understand how your particular disability impacts you – especially if you are considering a return to school or work. After all, you were not born with this disability. Part of your recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration into the workforce or an academic setting will be understanding your disability, how it impacts you, and what functional limitations you might experience.

4.2 How Disability is Defined in Various Contexts

Disability is often misunderstood. For instance, it is not a “handicap.” Living with a disability means that you have a condition that was caused by an accident, trauma, genetics, or disease that may limit your mobility, hearing, vision, speech, or mental function. Anyone can experience a disability and probably will if they live long enough. That said, many of the agencies with which veterans will engage define disability differently.

4.2.1. The Department of Veterans Affairs

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) assigns disability as a percentage (anywhere from 0% to 100%). To qualify for VA disability compensation, you must have a disability that VA determines was incurred or aggravated as the result of your military service, and thus deemed

to be “service connected.”⁵ VA often uses service connection to determine entitlements to other benefits including health care and vocational rehabilitation.

VA disability ratings are not arbitrarily assigned. A medical examination must be completed in order to evaluate and assess the severity of disability before a rating can be determined based on the VA’s Disability Rating Schedule, which is organized under a variety of body systems, including cardiovascular system, digestive system, respiratory system, and mental disorders. The Rating Schedule correlates injury and/or illness to a percentage rating that estimates the reduction in average earnings capacity caused by the disability.

- Resources for more information about disability compensation:
 - [Veterans Guide to Veterans Benefits \(VetsFirst Knowledge Book\)](#)
 - *Submit a question or a request for assistance to [Ask VetsFirst](#)*
 - *A [Guide to Federal Benefits for Disabled Veterans, Dependents and Survivors](#) is updated every year and published by the Department of Veterans Affairs.*
 - *Check out your state’s [Veterans Affairs office](#) and ask for a benefits specialist.*
 - *Contact a [Veterans Service Organization](#). These organizations provide a wide range of free services to veterans and their families.*

4.2.2. Social Security

Social Security has a different definition of disability. Social Security does not use percentages of disability. You are either determined to have a disability or you do not. To be found disabled: (1) you must be unable to do substantial work because of your medical condition(s); and (2) your medical condition(s) must have lasted, or be expected to last, at least one year or to result in death. Military servicemembers may be eligible to receive expedited processing of disability claims from Social Security. Benefits available through Social Security are different than those from VA and require a separate application. You can receive Social Security Disability Insurance and VA disability compensation benefits at the same time. Eligibility under one system does not mean entitlement under the other.

- More information about Social Security Benefits for Disabled Veterans:
 - [Military Service and Social Security](#)
 - *If you became disabled while on Active Duty Military Service on or after 10/1/2001, you may be eligible for [expedited processing](#) of a disability claim.*

⁵ Service-connected disabilities are defined as current chronic disabilities diagnosed by a medical professional and determined by the VA to have been caused or aggravated by military service or secondary to an existing service-connected disability.

- *Special benefits are also available for certain [WWII veterans](#).*
- *The [Ticket to Work](#) program is an initiative to provide Social Security beneficiaries with the choices, opportunities, and support needed to become and stay employed, increase earnings, and reduce reliance on Social Security benefits.*

4.2.3. Employment and Education

Defining disability in employment and education is much more complicated – and is defined under the law to ensure equal protections and nondiscrimination. It is defined by type, category (cognitive, emotional, physical, etc.) or diagnosis (bi-polar disorder, learning disability, quadriplegia, etc.), and may often be defined by personal experience. To make matters even more confusing, being considered a person with a disability in one workforce or academic context does not necessarily equate to being a person with a disability in another. More about this topic can be found in the section, Disability in the Eyes of the Law.

4.3. Disability in the Eyes of the Law

The law defines disability according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the subsequent Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life. According to the ADA, disability is defined as “any individual who has a physical or mental impairment⁶ that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities⁷ of such individual, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as⁸ having such an impairment.”

To be considered a person with a disability, and a member of this protected class, you must first meet a legal standard referred to as “qualified.” In the workforce, a “qualified person with a disability” basically means you have the requisite skills for the job to which you are applying (or currently hold) with or without a reasonable accommodation. A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment that will help you to succeed. In postsecondary education, a “qualified person with a disability” means you meet the academic standards for admission or participation with or without a reasonable accommodation.

⁶ A “physical or mental impairment” includes “any mental or psychological disorder, such as an intellectual disability, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities.”

⁷ Major life activities are those functions that are important to most people’s daily lives. Examples of major life activities are breathing, walking, talking, hearing, seeing, sleeping, caring for one’s self, performing manual tasks, and working.

⁸ “Regarded as” means that the person either: (a) has an impairment that does not substantially limit a major life activity; (b) has an impairment that substantially limits a major life activity only as a result of the attitudes of others toward them; or (c) does not have any impairment, but is treated by an entity as having an impairment.

4.3.1. Equal Protections and Anti-Discrimination

Since disability is considered a protected class under the law, it is important to be aware of these laws so that you understand both your rights and responsibilities and those of institutions of higher education and the workplace. There are three main laws that offer antidiscrimination protections for service-connected disabled veterans and veterans/people with disabilities: The ADA; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

4.3.1.a. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The ADA was signed into law on July 26, 1990. Its overall purpose is to make our society more accessible to people with disabilities. In 2008, the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) was passed. Its purpose was to broaden the definition of disability, which had been narrowed by U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

There are five distinct titles under the ADA: Title I – Employment; Title II – Public Services; Title III – Public Accommodations; Title IV – Telecommunications; and Title V – Miscellaneous Provisions. Title I of the ADA, which is enforced by the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) (EEOC), prohibits private, state, and local government employers with 15 or more employees from discriminating against individuals on the basis of disability.

- *An easy-to-understand summary of the five Titles of the ADA can be found on [the Job Accommodation Network website](#).*

Title I of the ADA prohibits an employer from treating an applicant or employee unfavorably in all aspects of employment – including hiring, promotions, job assignments, training, termination, and any other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment – because he or she has a disability, a history of having a disability, or because the employer *regards*⁹ him or her as having a disability. That means, for example, that it is illegal for an employer to refuse to hire a veteran because he has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), because he was previously diagnosed with PTSD, or because the employer assumes he has PTSD.

⁹ Under the ADAAA, the definition of “regarded as” is very broad. An individual meets the requirement of “being regarded as having such an impairment” if the individual establishes that he or she has been subjected to a discriminatory action because of an actual or perceived physical or mental impairment, whether or not the impairment limits or is perceived to limit a major life activity. It is important to note that “regarded as” does not apply to impairments that are “transitory and minor.” A transitory impairment is an impairment with an “actual or expected duration of 6 months or less.”

- *Additional examples:*
 - *A man, who is in line for a promotion, has a history of cancer related to his exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam, although he is now free of cancer. He is not given the promotion because his bosses are worried that, if his cancer returns, he won't be able to do the job. He does not, at this point, meet the first part of the definition of disability because he does not have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. However, based on his "record of" an impairment, he is being discriminated against.*
 - *A woman applies for a job as a customer service representative at a department store. Her face is badly scarred from an accident. The interviewer doesn't want to give her the job, in spite of her skills and experience, because he thinks customers will be uncomfortable looking at her. She is not substantially limited in any major life activity, but the interviewer is "regarding her as" if she has a disability.*
 - *A combat veteran was hired as a computer support (help desk) specialist for a large company. While the veteran has some back issues, there was no need to disclose any disability because his back pain does not interfere with his ability to do the job and be productive. After a month on the job, the veteran was let go (without reason). A former colleague told him there had been talk about his veteran status and the company feared he had PTSD and would be a danger to the work environment. This veteran was "regarded as" having a disability and was discriminated against.*

The ADA also limits the medical information employers may obtain and prohibits disability-based harassment and retaliation.

- *A very helpful resource from the EEOC has been updated, [Understanding Your Rights Under the Americans with Disabilities Act: A Guide for Veterans](#).*
- *[Understanding the ADA](#) is also a helpful guide distributed by United Spinal Association.*

Finally, the ADA provides that, absent undue hardship (significant difficulty or expense to the employer), applicants and employees with disabilities are entitled to *reasonable accommodation* when it comes to applying for jobs, performing their jobs, and enjoying equal benefits and privileges of employment (e.g., access to the parts of an employer's facility available to all employees and access to employer-sponsored training and social events). In the workplace, reasonable accommodations are often referred to as productivity tools.

- *A reasonable accommodation is any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions. Reasonable accommodation also includes adjustments to assure that a qualified individual with a disability has rights and privileges in employment equal to those of employees without disabilities. (Department of Justice)*

The ADA is not a “hiring preference” law, nor does it entitle a person with a disability to employment. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. This means that if you are qualified for a job, an employer cannot refuse to hire you because you have a disability or because you may need a reasonable accommodation to perform the job. Even if you are qualified for a job, an employer may choose another applicant without a disability because that individual is better qualified.

- *While not an enforcement or regulatory agency, the [ADA National Network](#) provides information, guidance, and training on the ADA. For more information, and the resources available to you, contact your [regional office](#).*

4.3.1.b. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in three areas: (1) employment by the executive branch of the federal government, (2) employment by most federal government contractors, and (3) activities funded by federal subsidies or grants, including companies or organizations receiving federal funding (which generally includes most institutions of higher education).

The Rehabilitation Act, in the discrimination context, is often referred to by the name of one of its sections. For example, Section 504 forbids organizations and employers from excluding or denying individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive program benefits and services. It defines the rights of individuals with disabilities to participate in, and have access to, program benefits and services. Section 504 is to the executive branch of the federal government, federal contractors, and most institutions of higher education what the ADA is to private and other employers (with 15 or more employees), including state and local governments.

- *Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act applies the same standards of non-discrimination and reasonable accommodation as the ADA to federal executive branch agencies and the United States Postal Service.*

- *Documents explaining Title I of the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act can be found at EEOC.gov.*

4.3.1.c. Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)

USERRA prohibits employers from discriminating against employees or applicants for employment on the basis of their military status or military obligations. It also protects the reemployment rights of individuals who leave their civilian jobs (whether voluntarily or involuntarily) to serve in the uniformed services, including the U.S. Reserve forces and state, District of Columbia, and territory (e.g., Guam) National Guards.

Under USERRA, employers must make "reasonable efforts" to help a veteran who is returning to employment after military service to become qualified to perform the duties of the position whether or not the veteran has a service-connected disability. This could include providing training or retraining for the position. USERRA applies to all veterans, not just those with service-connected disabilities, and to all employers regardless of size. For more information on the re-employment rights of uniformed service personnel, visit the [USERRA Information page](#) on the U.S. Department of Labor's website.

- *Both the ADA and USERRA require employers to make reasonable accommodations for disabled veterans. However, USERRA goes further because it also compels employers to make reasonable efforts to assist a veteran returning to the workforce to become qualified for a job. Such reasonable efforts could include training or retraining for a position.*
- *For more information about USERRA, visit the U.S. Department of Labor's online [USERRA Advisor](#).*

4.3.2. Veterans' Preference and Other Affirmative Action Regulations

A few additional employment-related regulations exist to give disabled veterans and people with disabilities a *preference* in the employment process. **These laws do not equal entitlement to a job, but entitlement to a preference in hiring.** They are applicable to employment in the federal government, some state governments, and many government contracts. When considering federal employment, it is wise to consider all potential avenues – including those specifically targeting people with disabilities. More about this subject can be found in Section 4 of this Knowledge Book.

4.3.2.a. Veterans' Preference Act

Under the Veterans' Preference Act, veterans with and without disabilities are entitled to preference over others in federal hiring from competitive lists of eligible applicants and may be considered for special noncompetitive appointments for which they are eligible. While

veterans' preference may offer a hiring preference over non-veterans, it does not eliminate competition, as veterans will be competing with other veterans. Additionally, agencies are not required to use veterans' preference or any other appointment process.

- *Some states and local governments may also grant veterans' preference for employment consideration. To find out if your state has a veterans' preference program, contact your [state Labor Department](#). Check out your local/county government's careers website to see if veterans' preference applies.*

4.3.2.b. Vietnam Era Veteran's Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA)

The Vietnam Era Veteran's Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA) requires that businesses with a federal contract or subcontract in the amount of \$100,000 or more entered into on or after December 1, 2003, take affirmative action to employ and advance qualified disabled veterans. This requirement also applies to contracts entered into before December 1, 2003, in the amount of \$25,000 or more. VEVRAA also requires these businesses to list their employment openings with the appropriate employment service and to give covered veterans priority in referral to such openings.

4.3.2.c. Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act

Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act says that any contract in excess of \$10,000 entered into by any federal department or agency for the procurement of personal property and non-personal services (including construction) for the United States shall contain a provision requiring that the party contracting with the United States shall take affirmative action to employ and advance in employment qualified individuals with disabilities. This includes disabled veterans who identify as a person with a disability.

- *The provisions of [VEVRAA](#) and [Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) are enforced by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs within the U.S. Department of Labor.*

4.3.2.d. Schedule A Hiring Authority

Federal agencies also may use specific rules and regulations, called "special hiring authorities," to hire individuals with disabilities outside the normal competitive hiring process, and sometimes may even be required to give preferential treatment to disabled veterans, when making hiring decisions.

- *For more information about Schedule A, please refer to [The ABC's of Schedule A](#).*
- *Detailed information about special hiring authorities, including Veterans' Preference in the federal government can be found at [Feds Hire Vets](#).*

- *Additional information about employment with the federal government can be found in Section Two of this Knowledge Book.*

Job-seeking veterans with disabilities are encouraged to ask for consideration under as many hiring authorities as they are eligible, in addition to claiming their preference under the competitive examining process (if applicable).

4.3.3. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

The FMLA grants qualified employees¹⁰ a total of 12 work weeks of unpaid (and, if necessary, intermittent) leave during a 12-month period¹¹ for health-related reasons, including ongoing medical treatments and doctor’s appointments, childbirth, family illness, or personal health reasons that preclude handling the job’s duties. In most cases, the employee is guaranteed return to work in the same or comparable position. FMLA is enforced by the Department of Labor and applies to private employers with 50 or more employees within a 75-mile radius, state and local governments, and most federal employees.

- *More information about the FMLA can be found on the Department of Labor [website](#), including details about the [FMLA Special Rules for Returning Reservists](#).*

4.4. What To Do If You Think You Have Experienced Discrimination?

The law prohibits discrimination in every aspect of employment – from recruitment to promotion. While most employers likely do not *intentionally* discriminate, it certainly does happen. If you think you have been discriminated against because of your disability (or race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or age), educate yourself on the EEOC’s [rights of employees and job applicants](#) before you decide on what, if any, action you might take. If you are unsure if you have experienced discrimination or have any questions about the process for filing a complaint, [contact the EEOC](#) directly and/or seek out legal advice.

NOTE: Disability and employment law is very complicated – and this section is not intended to serve as legal advice or a substitute for legal counsel. If you are in need of legal services, the American Bar Association offers [ABA Homefront](#) and helps to connect veterans and military families with the legal services they need. Pro bono services may also exist in your [local community](#).

¹⁰ To be eligible for FMLA benefits, an employee must: (1) work for a covered employer; (2) have worked for the employer for a total of 12 months; (3) have worked at least 1,250 hours over the previous 12 months; and (4) work at a location in the United States or in any territory or possession of the United States where at least 50 employees are employed by the employer within 75 miles.

¹¹ An employer has the right to require an employee to run FMLA leave concurrent with paid leave.

SECTION 5. SELF-ADVOCACY: KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Self-advocacy is a concept that deals with making decisions about your own life. Often times, this concept is quite foreign to servicemembers and veterans because military culture is one of being told what to do and doing it. Clearly, life away from the military is not as structured and many veterans experience some level of uncertainty when it comes to managing the landscape of civilian life. The process of moving from a culture of support to one of being expected to “do it on your own” can be challenging.

Section 5 Objectives:

- Discover the importance of being a proactive advocate at work, at school, and in your community.
- Recognize the importance of accessing services for your physical and mental health – so you can remain connected to education, the workforce, and your community.
- Learn about the resources available to you – as a person with a disability and as a disabled veteran.

5.1. Developing Self-Advocacy Skills

To be successful in school or a workforce setting, it will be important to learn and practice some of the basics of self-advocacy. This includes proactively developing an understanding of what you need to be successful, effectively communicating those needs, and asking for help along the way. This will require you to educate yourself about your rights and responsibilities, as a disabled veteran, in the workplace or at school. Developing these skills may take some time – and will require you give yourself permission to make some mistakes along the way – and that you regard any mistakes as a learning experience.

Why is it important to develop these skills? Learning your rights and responsibilities as a person with a disability will help you better navigate some of the processes and procedures that have been put in place to help you succeed. Much of this revolves around learning how your disability or injury impacts you at school or at work (if, indeed, it does), being able to describe your skills and strengths (in language that says what you can do . . . not what you can't), and requesting reasonable accommodations.

Self-advocacy is more an art than a science, because it will look different and feel different to every person. Some veterans are natural self-advocates, while others, not so much (this is really no different than the rest of the population). It is all about figuring out what you want, making a plan to get it, and executing it without being afraid to ask for help (whenever needed) along the way.

Whether you are getting ready to transition from the military to the civilian world or you made that transition some time ago, as a veteran with a disability, you are the one in charge of your academic and career destiny, and you will need to be proactive. The more you are aware of the resources available to you, the better positioned you will be when it comes to navigating them. While there is no guarantee, advocating for yourself is the most direct way to secure the resources you need.

5.2. Self-Advocacy at School, Work, and in Your Community

As a veteran with a disability, you may find it necessary to seek out and request different resources and services at school, at work, and in your community.

5.2.1 Self-Advocacy at School

Postsecondary schools (universities, community colleges, and technical schools) do not have a duty to find veteran students with disabilities. Rather, it is incumbent on a student to notify a school about veteran status and/or any disability that may require an academic adjustment or reasonable accommodation.

- *Requesting accommodations at school does not mean you are requesting a different standard, it simply means allowing you to demonstrate what you know in a mode that best fits your needs.*
- *There is no one list of reasonable academic accommodations that will serve the needs of all students with disabilities. The following are some basic examples:*
 - 1) *Extending time on examinations (this does not mean extended preparation time, except in rare instances)*
 - 2) *Providing exams in alternate format (if appropriate to subject matter), and might involve a reader or a taped version of an exam or an alternative to computer-scored answer sheets*
 - 3) *Providing a note taker or allowing a note taking device for class*
 - 4) *Taking exams in a distraction-reduced setting and/or in a different format (oral, taped, or typed)*
 - 5) *Arranging for students with a hearing loss to have sound amplified – this may require faculty to wear a voice amplifying microphone*

Before, during, or after admission, if you believe you will need academic adjustments, find out which office provides services to students with disabilities (this may be referred to as Academic Support Services, Disability Support Services, or something similar). Contact the office as early as possible and determine what supporting documentation is required to establish that you have a disability and are eligible for academic adjustments [Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability rating paperwork will often suffice]. You should expect the school to work with you in an *interactive* process (e.g., begin a conversation) to identify what you need and how it can be provided. If you do not actively participate in the process, you are much less likely to receive appropriate academic adjustments.

- VA's [VetSuccess on Campus](#) is a program that strives to provide resources for servicemembers, veterans, and their family members to ensure a successful transition to college life. Vet Success on Campus representatives can work with servicemembers and veterans (both with and without service-connected disabilities) as well as their dependents. As of 2012, 32 programs exist on college campuses – and more are expected in 2013. A [complete list of VetSuccess on Campus locations](#) and contact information is available in a spreadsheet format.

5.2.2. Self-Advocacy at Work

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employers are only required to provide accommodations for employees who are experiencing workplace problems because of a disability. Therefore, unless you disclose to your employer that you have a disability and need an accommodation, the employer is not obligated to consider accommodations under the ADA.

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, you only have to let your employer know that you need an adjustment or change at work for a reason related to a medical condition. You can use "plain English" to make your request and you do not have to mention the ADA or use the phrase "reasonable accommodation." Here are some examples:

- *Example 1: An employee tells her supervisor, "I'm having trouble getting to work at my scheduled starting time because of medical treatments I'm undergoing." This is a request for a reasonable accommodation.*
- *Example 2: An employee tells his supervisor, "I need six weeks off to get treatment for a back problem." This is a request for a reasonable accommodation.*
- *Example 3: A new employee, who uses a wheelchair, informs the employer that her wheelchair cannot fit under the desk in her office. This is a request for reasonable accommodation.*

- *Example 4: An employee tells his supervisor that he would like a new chair because his present one is uncomfortable. This statement is insufficient to put the employer on notice that he is requesting a reasonable accommodation, as he does not link his need for the new chair with a medical condition.*

Two resources available to you regarding self-advocacy, accommodations, and employment include the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program's VetSuccess and the Job Accommodation Network (JAN).

- *The primary function of the VR&E program is to help veterans who have service-connected disabilities become employed, maintain employment, or achieve independence in daily living. This may include the creation of an individualized rehabilitation plan, medical and dental referrals, the coordination of an employment-focused training allowance, tutorial assistance, adjustment counseling, the purchase of assistive technology, and more. Apply for services in person at any VR&E [office](#) or [online](#)*
- *[JAN](#) offers a variety of resources related to disability and accommodations. Particularly related to self-advocacy is information on disclosure, such as [Disability Disclosure and Interview Techniques](#) and the [Dos and Don'ts of Disclosure](#).*

5.2.3. Self-Advocacy in Your Community

You may find yourself needing assistance in accessing services and resources within your community – aside from at school or at work. Maybe you need help locating accessible or affordable housing, or maybe you are in need of services related to your veteran status. Remember, you are both a veteran and a citizen of your community – so you have generic, community-based services available to you, as well as any veteran-specific services you may already be receiving. Some of these resources include, but are not limited to:

- *Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are private, nonprofit organizations that provide services to maximize the independence of individuals with disabilities and the accessibility of the communities in which they live. These centers offer services such as: advocacy, information and referral, peer counseling, and more. Many CILs across the country partner with veterans organizations to ensure that veterans with disabilities know about and have access to these services. Contact a [Center for Independent Living](#) in your state for more information.*
- *If you served in any combat zone (any era), Vet Centers are available in many communities and can provide assistance in a number of areas, including employment screening and health-related referrals. These centers partner with organizations in the community and also have VA benefits specialists available if you need help navigating*

the VA Benefits system. Find a [Vet Center](#) in your area, or call 877-927-8397 (877-WAR-VETS).

- The [National Disability Rights Network](#) is a nonprofit organization – and the largest provider of legally based advocacy services to people with disabilities in the United States. Resources are available at the [state](#) level and include issues related to community living, criminal justice, employment, and more.

5.3. Staying Healthy

While not often considered a strategy for finding work or attending school, keeping yourself healthy and proactively accessing the resources available to you for healthcare (both physical and mental health) is a responsibility you have to yourself and your family.

As with all other veterans benefits available through VA, eligibility and application is required (for the purposes of VA health benefits and services, a person who served in the active military service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable is an eligible veteran). Comprehensive VA health benefits include preventative care, health promotion and disease prevention, inpatient care, specialty care, and more.

- The VA has developed a [Veterans Health Benefits Guide](#) to provide veterans general information about the VA Medical Benefits Package. The information in the Veterans Health Benefits Guide reflects the benefits and services available.
- More information about VA Healthcare Services and how to protect your health can be found on its [website](#).
- The [National Resource Directory's health section](#) offers information and resources on health-related issues, treatment options, locations of medical facilities, insurance programs, and tips on staying healthy.

[Vet Centers](#) offer readjustment counseling and a wide range of psychosocial services offered to eligible veterans and their families in the effort to make a successful transition from military to civilian life. To find the Vet Center services nearest to you, use the [location map](#) or call 877-WAR-VETS (927-8387)

Vet Center services include the following:

- Individual and group counseling for veterans and their families
- Family counseling for military related issues
- Bereavement counseling for families who experience an active duty death
- Military sexual trauma counseling and referral
- Substance abuse assessment and referral
- Employment assessment and referral

- *VA benefits explanation and referral*
- *Screening and referral for medical issues including traumatic brain injury (TBI), depression, etc.*

5.4. Tips and Strategies For Self-Advocacy

Self-knowledge is the first step towards advocating for your rights. You need to know your strengths, needs, and interests before you can begin to advocate.

Basic tips for self-advocacy:

- *Know and understand your rights and responsibilities*
- *Learn all you can about your disability, needs, strengths, and limitations*
- *Know what accommodations you need as well as why you need them*
- *Know how to effectively/assertively communicate your needs and preferences*
- *Find out who the key people are and how to contact them if necessary*
- *Be willing to ask questions when something is unclear or you need clarification*

Self-advocacy isn't a skill you learn overnight. They are skills that are developed and nurtured over time and with lots of practice. Here are some ideas you can use as you start to develop a solid sense of what it will take to hone your self-advocacy skills and why they are necessary.

1. Learn to talk about your military work experiences – without acronyms – so that others can understand what you did. You will probably need to practice this because it isn't going to be an easy thing to do. Highlight skills that translate to your civilian employer. For example, the planning that goes into a patrol means that you have the capacity to plan ahead, garner necessary logistics and supplies, establish primary and secondary objectives, plan contingencies for when things don't go according to plan, and work through obstacles to get a job done.
2. Learn more about your specific disability or injury, how it might impact you at work or at school. Focus on your abilities and the supports and/or accommodations you may need to be as productive as possible.
3. Educate yourself on reasonable accommodations and the process for requesting accommodations. Reasonable accommodations – often referred to as productivity tools – can range from flexible schedules to using technology to help you keep track of appointments, take notes, read, or write.
4. Seek out resources. At school, get involved in a student veterans group – or create one. Locate the office for disability services and find out what they have to offer. At work, get involved in a veterans/military employee resource group; offer to mentor a newly hired

veteran if you have been on the job for a while; help your employer become an active supporter of the [Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve](#).

5. Research and understand the laws that might impact you as a student or an employee, or those that impact a caregiver in your family. These include: the ADA, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, and the Family Medical Leave Act to name a few.
6. Don't wait for feedback . . . ask for it. If you are in school and aren't sure about a paper you are writing, make an appointment to meet with the professor. If you are on the job and need to know if you are performing to the expectations of those in charge, ask for a meeting. Be proactive! This means not waiting until things are spiraling out of control before asking for help.
7. Familiarize yourself with the signs and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and mild TBI – if not for you, for a fellow veteran. While most veterans are returning from combat and able to reintegrate into society with little trouble, about one-third of the military population is working through some challenges related to stress, depression, and head injury. Recognizing the signs and symptoms in yourself or someone else – and knowing where to get help – are two pieces of information every veteran should know. Check out [About Face](#), a resource from the National Center on PTSD. This resource is designed to help you learn about PTSD from veterans who live with it every day – and discover how treatment turned their lives around.
8. Know where to find the resources you need . . . and/or know who can help you find them. Keep a log of people, places, and resources – and share these resources with others.

5.5. Reaching Out to Veterans Service Organizations

Veterans service organizations (VSOs) provide a wide range of free services for veterans and their dependents. While a “chartered¹²” VSO can provide assistance with benefits and VA claims, other services may include advocacy, career counseling, mentorship, temporary financial assistance, family support networks, advice on medical issues and much, much more.

- *For questions regarding your veterans benefits or benefits that your family members may be entitled to, check out the [VetsFirst Resource Center](#) or [submit a request for assistance](#).*
- *[VetJobs](#) provides an excellent list of service organizations.*

¹² A VSO that is “chartered” means it is recognized or approved by the VA Secretary to advocate for you and represent you in VA claims.

SECTION 6. RESOURCES & GUIDING QUESTIONS

The resources mentioned within this Knowledge Book are certainly not all inclusive of the many resources out there to help you succeed. The most important resource you have is the creation of a network of support. Surround yourself with people who can help you, who you can turn to at any time, and who have your best interests in mind. Do not expect these people to make decisions for you – but use them as a way to educate yourself to make informed decisions about your education and your career.

The Guiding Questions presented at the end of this section are provided to help you begin to identify the important questions to be asking yourself as you gear up to your future employment and education opportunities.

Resources For Section 2: Creating Your Path To Employment

Military Translators

- [O*NET military crosswalk](#)
- [My Next Move for Vets](#)
- [VA for Vets](#)

Assessments

- [My Next Move for Vets](#)
- VA for Vets online [Career Center](#)
- VetJobs' [CRI Career Advisor](#)

Military Search Engines

- [Military.com](#)
- [Hero2Hired](#)
- [Veterans Job Bank](#)
- [Mil2Fed](#)

Support in Your Community

- [Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialist](#)
- [One Stop Career Centers](#)
- [State Directors of Employment and Training](#)
- [“How to Find a Job”](#) article by VetJobs

Researching Jobs/Occupations/Careers

- [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)
- [O*NET](#)

Networking

- [LinkedIn's veteran resources](#)
- [Veteran Career Network](#) from Military.com

Resume

- [Resume Profile Template](#)
- [Personal Branding Guides](#) from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- VA for Vets [Career Center](#) resume builder

Accommodations Information

- An [interactive process](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network](#)
- [Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program](#)

Mentors

- [American Corporate Partners](#)
- [Veterans Career Network](#)

Federal Employment

- [USA Jobs](#)
- [Veterans' Preference](#)
- [Veterans' Preference Advisor](#)
- [Feds Hire Vets](#)
- Feds Hire Vets [agency directory](#)
- [VA for VETS](#)

Special Hiring Authorities in Federal Employment

- [Veterans' Recruitment Appointment](#)
- [Veterans Employment Opportunity Act of 1998, as amended](#)
- [30% or More Disabled Veteran](#)
- [Disabled Veterans Enrolled in a VA Training Program](#)
- [Schedule A Appointing Authority](#)

Private Industry

- [Personal Branding Guides](#) from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- [Guide to Leading Policies, Practices & Resources: Supporting the Employment of Veterans and Military Families](#) from the [Institute for Veterans and Military Families](#)

- [Idealist](#)
- VetJobs's [Niche job sites](#)

Self-Employment

- Small Business Administration's [Office of Veterans Business Development](#).
- [Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities](#)
- International Franchise Association's [VetFran](#)

Volunteering and Internships

- VA's VetSuccess [Non-Paid Work Experience program](#)
- [United We Serve](#)
- [The Mission Continues](#)
- [Corporation for National and Community Service](#)
- [AmeriCorp](#)
- [Operation Warfighter](#)

Other Employment Resources

- One Stop Career Center [Service Locator](#)
- [Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment \(VR&E\) VetSuccess program](#)
- State [Departments of Labor](#) and/or [Veterans Affairs](#)
- Local [Vet Centers](#)
- [National Resource Directory](#)
- [Google for Vets](#)

Resources For Section 3: Choosing School As a Path To Employment

GI Bill Benefits

- [Post 9/11 GI Bill Benefits](#)
- [Today's GI Bill](#)
- IAVA's [GI Bill Benefits Calculator](#)
- [Department of Veterans Affairs](#)

[Academic Accommodations for TBI and PTSD](#)

[Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services](#)

[VA Work-Study Program](#)

[Student Veterans of America](#)

Resources For Section 4: Understanding and Defining Disability

VA Disability Compensation

- [Veterans Guide to Veterans Benefits \(VetsFirst Knowledge Book\)](#)
- [Ask VetsFirst](#) – submit a request for assistance
- [Guide to Federal Benefits for Disabled Veterans, Dependents and Survivors](#)
- State [Veterans Affairs offices](#)

Social Security Benefits

- [Military Service and Social Security](#)
- [Expedited processing](#) (Post 9/11 veterans)
- [WWII veterans](#) special benefits
- [Ticket to Work](#)

The Americans With Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act (ADA)

- [Fact Sheet on the Americans with Disabilities Act](#)
- [Five Titles of the ADA](#)
- [Understanding Your Rights Under the Americans with Disabilities Act: A Guide for Veterans](#) from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- [Understanding the ADA](#)
- [ADA National Network](#)

Other Disability Laws Affecting Veterans

- [The Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)
- [Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act \(USERRA\)](#) information page
- [USERRA Advisor](#)
- [Vietnam Era Veteran's Readjustment Assistance Act](#)
- [Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act](#)

Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs – [protected veterans rights](#); [disability rights](#)

Schedule A Hiring Authority

- [The ABC's of Schedule A](#)
- [Feds Hire Vets](#)

Family Medical Leave Act

- [Family Medical Leave Act](#)
- [Special Rules for Returning Reservists](#)

Equal Employment Opportunities Commission

- [Understanding Your Rights Under the Americans with Disabilities Act: A Guide for Veterans](#)
- [Rights of employees and job applicants](#)
- [Filing a discrimination complaint filing a complaint](#)

Legal resources for military families – [ABA Homefront](#)

Resources For Section 5: Self-Advocacy: Knowing Your Rights and Responsibilities

Self-Advocacy at School

- VA's [VetSuccess on Campus](#) and [campus locations](#)

Self-Advocacy at Work

- [Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment \(VR&E\) VetSuccess program](#)
- VR&E [online](#) application
- [Job Accommodation Network](#)
- [Disability Disclosure and Interview Techniques](#)
- [Dos and Don'ts of Disclosure.](#)

Self-Advocacy in Your Community

- [Centers for Independent Living](#)
- [Vet Centers](#) or call 877-927-8397 (877-WAR-VETS).
- [National Disability Rights Network](#)

Staying Healthy

- [Veterans Health Benefits Guide](#)
- [VA Healthcare Services](#)
- The [National Resource Directory's health section](#)
- Vet Center [location map](#) or call 877-WAR-VETS (**927-8387**)

Tips and Strategies For Self-Advocacy

- [Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve](#) (ESGR)
- [About Face](#) from the National Center on PTSD

Reaching out to Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs)

- [VetsFirst Resource Center](#) | [submit a request for assistance.](#)
- VetJobs' [List of VSOs](#)

Guiding Questions For Section 2 – Creating Your Path to Employment

1. Do I know my dream job – or the type of job I’m looking for (on my way to my dream job)? If not, have I considered taking an interest assessment to help me consider what I might enjoy doing in the civilian workforce?
2. Do I know that the type of job I am searching for is available in my local community?
3. Do I have a network I can turn to for assistance with my job search?
4. Can a civilian human resources representative easily understand my resume? Have I checked it to be sure my skills are captured using some of the language in the company’s job description?
5. Have I considered what I will need as a person with a disability in the workforce? Do I know what accommodations exist? Do I know what I might need to be more productive? Might I need an accommodation in the interview process? If so, have I considered how I will discuss (disclose) my need in this regard?
6. If considering federal employment, have I considered special hiring authorities targeting disabled veterans *and* people with disabilities?
7. Who am I turning to for support during my job search? Who else might I want to include in this list?

Guiding Questions For Section 3 – Choosing School as a Path to Employment

1. Do I know what GI Bill benefits I am entitled to? Have I applied for benefits?
2. Recognizing that a stamp of “veteran-friendly” is highly subjective, how am I going to determine if a school is right for me?
3. What are my plans to get involved on campus? Will I want to seek out a school that offers veteran-specific coursework?
4. What academic accommodations might I need as a student veteran with a disability? If I’m not sure, how can I find out?
5. Knowing the adjustment to school could be a difficult one (both as a veteran and a student with a disability), who can I reach out to? Who will be my sounding board?

Guiding Questions For Section 4 – Understanding and Defining Disability

1. Do I clearly understand my diagnosis, injury, or disability? How does it impact me as a person? What are some of the functional limitations (physical or mental) I experience in connection to this injury or disability?
2. Considering the definition of disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act, do I qualify as a person with a disability?

3. As a disabled veteran, why might I choose to identify myself as a person with a disability?

Guiding Questions For Section 5 – Self Advocacy: Knowing Your Rights and Responsibilities

1. Considering the definition of self-advocacy in this section, do I consider myself a good self-advocate? What are some steps I can take to improve my self-advocacy skills?
2. Why would I need to advocate for myself at school or at work?
3. Am I skilled at describing my military skills in a way that a civilian could understand?
4. As a person with a disability, what is most important to me as I advocate for what I might need at school or at work?