

# Expanding Access to Employment for Veterans with Disabilities

## Part of the *Transportation for Our Military Series*

*This brief – part of a series focusing on the transportation needs of veterans and their families – provides employers with a better understanding of the transportation access needs of veterans with disabilities. It also suggests multiple options that veterans service organizations, in partnership with transportation providers, can encourage employers to take to meet those needs. Also included is an overview of tax incentives available to employers who make their work sites more accessible to accommodate veterans and other employees with disabilities.*

Recruitment and employment of veterans has recently increased and is expected to continue to grow as troops return from active military duty and transition to civilian life. More than one million troops are expected to transition to civilian life over the next five years. Many have disabilities from combat and other causes. Through a number of affordable steps, employers can adapt workplace environments and facilitate commutes for veterans with disabilities.

Employers are recognizing the benefits that veterans bring to their companies. In a survey of human resource professionals, approximately two-thirds of respondents – 64 percent – indicated they have hired veterans within the past three years.<sup>1</sup> Of those, nearly half made special efforts to do so.<sup>2</sup> These employers understand the benefits that veterans bring to their businesses – a strong sense of responsibility and an ability to see a project through to completion – among others. Other benefits to hiring veterans in coming years include the following:

- Employing veterans makes good business sense. Veterans are known problem solvers, have strong leadership skills, can help businesses gain a competitive edge, and mirror an important and increasing customer base.
- Recruiting, training and hiring veterans helps counter the effects of an aging and shrinking workforce.
- Hiring veterans with disabilities demonstrates an employer's social responsibility, a trait that customers are known to favor.

For some veterans, their disabilities – including amputations, visual or hearing impairments and cognitive impairments – influence the travel options available to them. Some may have multiple disabilities, each of which may impact their ability to travel differently. For example:

- Veterans may require more flexible work schedules that match available transportation options that accommodate their disability, but may be hesitant to ask for any special treatment from potential employers, fearing it will make them a less attractive candidate.
- Employers may offer phase-in programs, allowing new veteran employees to progress from part-time to full-time schedules. However, commuting part-time hours, outside of regular commuting times, without access to a personal vehicle, can be difficult for any employee; these potential challenges should be taken into consideration when planning transportation options for disabled veterans.
- Veterans may have non-physically discernible injuries that may impact their ability to use public transportation. For example,

<sup>1</sup> Society for Human Resource Management. "SHRM Poll: Military Employment. February 17, 2012." <http://www.shrm.org/Research/SurveyFindings/Articles/Pages/MilitaryEmploymentSHRMPoll.aspx> (accessed 8/23/12).

<sup>2</sup> The Vow to Hire Veterans Act established two tax credits for businesses that hire unemployed or disabled veterans as a component of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). Both the Returning Veterans Tax Credit and the Wounded Warrior Tax Credit expired on December 31, 2012. However, American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 includes an extension through 2013. For additional information, visit: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/VOW/index.htm>.

a veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may hesitate to travel by public transit because it is an unsecure environment and can be crowded.

- Veterans' injuries may leave them unable to drive or some veterans may not have access to a car because they cannot afford one or they may need to share a single vehicle with a family member. Promoting ridesharing and accessible transit opportunities may help alleviate challenges faced by these veterans.

## Transportation for Veterans with Disabilities

To assist veterans with a disability successfully re-integrate into civilian life, transportation access to job fairs, training opportunities, and employment is essential. Although many veterans with disabilities often use the same types of transportation options as their non-disabled peers and other commuters, there are specific programs available within communities to transport individuals with disabilities to work and other destinations. These programs include

- Reduced or free fares offered to uniformed military personnel and/or qualifying individuals with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>
- Paratransit services, required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Paratransit complements regular, federally funded public transportation for those who are unable to use

<sup>3</sup> Visit [http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/Chart\\_ReducedFareAndFreePrograms.pdf](http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/Chart_ReducedFareAndFreePrograms.pdf) to review a chart of reduced and free fare programs for which veterans and other individuals with disabilities may qualify.

# Strategies

## Helping Veterans with Disabilities Use Available Transportation Options

Facilitating the commute of veterans with disabilities need not be costly or time consuming.

Employers of veterans with disabilities can:

- Be flexible in setting work schedules for those reliant upon regularly scheduled or paratransit services
- Encourage ridesharing for veterans who may be unable to use public transportation, whose work shifts do not correspond with public transportation schedules or for whom public transportation may not be available
- Provide preferential parking near entrances served by elevators or accessible entrances for veterans and other employees with disabilities who share rides to work
- Consider purchasing, leasing or retrofitting company vehicles that can be used by all employees
- Provide information about ADA paratransit eligibility to employees with disabilities
- Partner with other employers to encourage local transportation providers to expand schedules and/or routes that serve local business sites
- Encourage local transit agencies to help veterans find affordable and dependable transportation services. In West Virginia, Mountain Line Transit Authority created Transportation Options for Veterans (TOPS), a free public service to help veterans and their families identify viable transportation options through numerous channels
- Provide telework options whenever possible
- Assist new riders by referring them to travel orientation or travel training<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Travel orientation informs groups of new riders, including individuals with disabilities, about navigating an agency's transit system and provides useful information about accommodations. Travel training is intensive instruction designed to teach individuals to travel safely and independently using public transportation. Easter Seals Project ACTION teaches travel trainers how to train customers as well as other trainers. To locate a travel trainer in your community, contact the [Association for Travel Instruction](#) or [Easter Seals Project ACTION](#).

regularly scheduled transit services. These services generally use smaller vehicles and provide advance-reservation service that picks up travelers at their homes or other location. They can be offered through the transit agency or by human service or non-profit agencies.

## Tax Incentives for Improving Access to Your Facility

Two federal tax incentives encourage and assist businesses to adapt their facilities to be more accessible to customers and workers, including veterans with disabilities.

- The Disabled Access Tax Credit (Title 26, Internal Revenue Code, Section 44) allows eligible small businesses (gross receipts of \$1 million or less or having 30 or fewer employees) to take a tax credit of up to 50 percent of “eligible access expenditures” per taxable year for the removal of architectural, communication, physical or transportation barriers that prevent a business from being accessible to or usable by individuals with disabilities.
- The Tax Deduction to Remove Architectural and Transportation Barriers to People with Disabilities and Elderly Individuals (Title 26, Internal Revenue Code, Section 190) allows any size business a deduction of up to \$15,000 for expenditures to make a facility or public transportation vehicle owned by or leased in connection with a trade or business more accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities or who are elderly. Examples include
  1. Providing accessible parking spaces, ramps and curb cuts
  2. Making phones, water fountains and restrooms wheelchair accessible
  3. Making walkways at least 48 inches wide, or
  4. Providing accessible building entrances, including stairs and floors

## For more information

Did you know? Across the nation, transportation providers and organizations serving veterans are working together to improve access to transportation for veterans and their families. To learn more about these state and local Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiatives and get involved, visit [www.fta.dot.gov/veterans](http://www.fta.dot.gov/veterans).

Read more about Joblinks' resources to support local partnerships in helping veterans, active duty service members, and their families access employment and other destinations through transit and ridesharing strategies.

Share your stories with us: The perspective of veterans and active duty service members is especially welcome. Visit <http://bit.ly/JoblinksVeterans>.

For information about tax benefits for businesses employing individuals with disabilities, visit <http://www.irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-&Self-Employed/Tax-Benefits-for-Businesses-Who-Have-Employees-with-Disabilities>

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued a guide for employers outlining protections for veterans with disabilities under ADA and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act. Visit: [http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/ada\\_veterans\\_employers.cfm](http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/ada_veterans_employers.cfm)

The White House Business Council issued a “Guide to Hiring Veterans” designed to provide businesses and organizations wishing to hire veterans with the resources needed to support and hire veterans. Visit: [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/white\\_house\\_business\\_council\\_guide\\_to\\_hiring\\_veterans\\_0.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/white_house_business_council_guide_to_hiring_veterans_0.pdf)

*The Joblinks Employment Transportation Center connects communities with transportation-to-work solutions. Visit us at [www.solutionstogether.org](http://www.solutionstogether.org).*

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