



Navigating the transition to civilian life

How might we support transitioning Service members' ability to navigate available resources and steps so they can confidently and successfully reintegrate into civilian life?

Each year, approximately 200,000 Service members leave the military and must reorient their lives. This includes fundamentals like their employment and education, finances, housing, health, and even relationships. Existing research shows that navigating the military transition can be burdensome and confusing for Veterans, their families, and their supporters. While progress has been made, data suggests that around half of all recently separated Veterans don't connect with available resources and benefits for several years, and sometimes only when they are in crisis. Improving military-to-civilian transition can serve as early intervention to downstream challenges with Veteran homelessness, suicide, health, unemployment and underemployment, and poverty. Addressing these challenges can have lasting ripple effects on a community of approximately 43 million Veterans, family members, survivors, and caregivers.

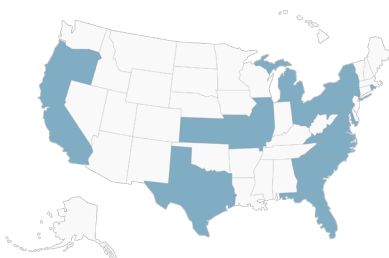
Executive Order 14058 directs the Federal government to identify "life experiences" that require interactions with multiple Federal agencies. Too often, people have to navigate a web of government websites, offices, and phone numbers to access the services they depend on. Government needs to better design and deliver services to meet people's needs in these moments.

Learn more about this work at: <https://www.performance.gov/cx/projects/>



The team spoke with:

- 50 recently separated Veterans
- 71 transitioning Service members
- 10 family members
- 69 individuals from the Department of Defense, Department of Labor, Department of Veterans Affairs, and community subject matter experts



Overall, the team spoke with 200 people through interviews as well as site visits to military installations.

To start, we listened to people's stories.

The Life Experience research team spoke with Service members, Veterans, and other military-connected people nationwide about this moment in their lives and where the government process could have been simpler and more helpful. The listening sessions captured honest conversations about people's experiences, candid feedback on what could have worked better, and what really made a difference for them.

We learned about some of the biggest pain points we have the opportunity to address:

PAIN POINT

Clarity of key steps

The current transition process lacks standardization and clarity around what's important. Planning how to navigate VA services while still in service, surrounded by active duty peers, can be confusing and difficult for Service members.

PAIN POINT

Lack of dedicated time

Service members are overloaded with information over a compressed timeframe that often prevents understanding and action. A Commander or Supervisor has an outsized influence on whether the Service member is granted the time, space, and acceptance to pursue their personal career transition.

PAIN POINT

Frustration with connection to service

For those Service members that had bad experiences during service— with their command, role, or environments— and those that may feel judgment from leaders or peers upon a decision to separate, a focus on "getting out" can increase hesitancy to even plan for or stay connected with programs that could help.

Learn more about this work at:
<https://www.performance.gov/cx/projects/transitioning-to-civilian-life/>



Story Excerpts

These story excerpts are composite representations of the actual people the team spoke with. The quotes and stories come directly from these conversations, but names have been changed.

Experience Milestones

Life Before Joining > Life in the Military > Planning to Separate > Navigating Separation > Adjusting to Civilian Life

Juanita

Views the military as a way to reach education and career goals
Unsure if she will stay or retire
Has a plan for civilian life



“The best way to describe the checklist [the military provides when you’re outprocessing] is a scavenger hunt. You have to turn in a bunch of paperwork, but it doesn’t give a lot of helpful information.”



Kari

Joined the military young without a plan for what’s after
Military culture is not a good fit
Will need to start from scratch in civilian life



“Well, I mean, I was at the end of my rope. I couldn’t go any further.”



Lewis

Entered the military at a young age
Proud of his service
Not sure what life holds after the military



“I haven’t wrapped my head around being a retired Veteran. I don’t want to walk in and say, I’m [my rank] retired.”

