

VA

EDUCATION SERVICE
GI BILL PROGRAMS



Building Your Future With the GI Bill®

PART THREE: A GUIDE TO FURTHERING YOUR CAREER



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The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) wants all eligible service members, Veterans and their families who utilize education benefits, to be set up to succeed and advance in their careers after completing their education goals. Entering the job market for the first time after completing military service or completing your studies can be a daunting task. This guide is meant to provide tips and information to help you begin or advance your career. In addition, it provides data around entrepreneurship, as well as support resources for both businesses and individuals. This is part three of a [three-part series](#) designed to assist GI Bill beneficiaries in navigating education pathways that will lead to meaningful and fulfilling careers.

Finding a Job

Finding a job is a multi-step process. As you achieve your educational goals, it's important to take the time to reflect on where you want to go with your career, and take the appropriate action to get there.

This guide will walk you through the major steps towards launching a meaningful career, including:

[Step 1: Building a Network](#)

[Step 2: Effective Job Searching](#)

[Step 3: Applying and Interviewing](#)

Step 1: Building a Network

Networking is a vital component to your professional success. Networking involves cultivating professional relationships with others whose professional opinions you can rely on. Your network can potentially help you with learning more about the field you would like to work in, searching for a job, and achieving your career goals. A strong and large network can help give you an advantage, which is why it is particularly important to build and maintain these relationships.

It might be a little daunting at first, but once you get the hang of networking, you will soon realize how easy and beneficial it is! Not sure where to begin? Your classmates, previously transitioned service members, school alumnus, buddies, and even your neighbors can be part of your network.

Find what connects you to them and use that connection to build your relationship, whether it is attending the same school, living in the same community, having the same hobbies, or being interested in the same career field. You can also reach out to create new connections. Politely explain who you are, how you got their contact information, and why you are interested in connecting. Ask to grab coffee or have a phone call and come prepared with a list of questions and topics to talk about. Use this time to gain information, without necessarily having a job suggestion as the end goal. Informational interviews are a great way to get advice on potential career paths, key skills to develop or even internship and job leads.

The biggest key to networking: maintain your network even when you're not looking for a job. Simply congratulate them on promotions, share an article when you see one that reminds you of them, or reach out occasionally. It's a two-way relationship and you never know when you might be able to help each other.



SOCIAL NETWORKS

As the employment process shifts to digital, social media is a great resource for expanding your network. Two great sites for online networking are:

- » [LinkedIn](#): A professional networking application where you can showcase your skills and experience, apply for jobs, and connect with people in your industry. LinkedIn offers a free 1-year [Job Seeker Premium](#) subscription to all U.S. Veterans and service members, as well as Veteran caregivers, Fry Scholars, and military spouses. Additionally, you can receive a year of access to LinkedIn Learning (formerly Lynda.com) to take on-demand courses, some of which are specifically designed for Veterans and transitioning service members.
- » [Rally Point](#): A platform geared for military and military-connected families that has the resources to help you build your professional network, explore career opportunities, and much more.

Step 2: Effective Job Searching

The key to getting a job in your intended industry is knowing what to search, where to search and understanding the job criteria. When looking for current job listings, you can find them on company websites, networking websites, and job search engine sites. Other sources include online job forums, your school's job portal, and even job fairs. When searching online, make sure to keep your job search focused by using keywords that match your interests and the location where you want to work. Narrowing your criteria will help filter through and only produce the job listings that are relevant. Many of these websites also have advanced search options that will filter the job listings even further.

VETERAN-SPECIFIC JOB SEARCH RESOURCES

There are many online resources specifically designed for Veterans looking for jobs. These include:

- » [Veterans.gov](#): A Department of Labor site that provides job search and employment resources for Veterans and military spouses. In addition to job listings from over 3,000 Veteran-friendly employers, it also includes a skills translator, a list of resources provided in your state, and opportunities for one-on-one assistance.

- » [VA Careers and Employment](#): Provides career and employment assistance, resources for managing your career (including job links), and more information on additional VA resources.

When looking at job listings, it is important to understand the job responsibilities and requirements to make sure your own professional and military experience and interests align. When creating job requirements, employers are setting expectations, but they may not find someone who meets all of their qualifications, which is why it's important to consider applying if you meet most, but not all, of the listed requirements. Depending on the company, you may be able to use your volunteer, internship or other learning experiences in place of an educational background requirement.

MILITARY-FRIENDLY COMPANIES

Many leading companies have initiatives to hire and grow Veteran talent. The [Veterans Job Mission](#), for example is a coalition of over 230 companies that plans to hire one million Veterans by 2025. In addition to hiring programs, many of these companies have affinity groups to foster community and share resources. Some even have onboarding programs specifically meant for Veterans to ensure they can smoothly transition and integrate into the company and the civilian workforce. Once you find a couple companies that you are interested in, it can be helpful to research if they will be a vendor at a career fair near you that you can attend.



ATTENDING CAREER FAIRS

Career fairs are a great way to meet employers and learn about job opportunities. [Student Veterans of America \(SVA\)](#) is an example of non-profit organization that hosts many career fairs to help Veterans make the most of the transition to civilian life, as well as finding and obtaining a job. Notably, SVA's National Conference is one of the largest annual career fairs for Veterans, attracting over 2,300 student Veterans, stakeholders, and supporters each year.

When attending career fairs in person, make sure to search the attending companies beforehand, dress in your best professional attire, and have a 30-60 second elevator speech ready. It is also important to bring multiple copies of your resume and supplies to take notes. Career fairs are a great opportunity to network with others, connect with someone in the industry you are interested in, or better yet, the company you are applying to, and ask about the cultural environment and norms. Feel free to ask them about how they adjusted to the corporate culture and for any tips or tricks that they can share with you. To continue these connections, remember to send a brief follow-up thank you note to the company representatives you met at the job fair. Taking the time to send a thank you note is a great way to restate your interest in the company and for them to remember who you are.

Step 3: Applying and Interviewing

When you find a job listing that you are interested in and qualify for, the first step is to check and update your resume with your most recent information. You can find ways to link your past experiences and duties to corporate roles and responsibilities. Although some military roles may be difficult to convey, most can be translated into civilian roles such as communications, leadership, logistics, strategic planning, and more. It is important to avoid adding military jargon and non-operational highlights to your resume, as it could potentially cause confusion among civilian recruiters. If you are having trouble defining skills and experience on your resume, there are resources online that you can leverage:

- » [Veteran Employment Center](#): Educational and career counseling (VA Chapter 36): Free educational and career guidance, planning, and resources to Veterans and their dependents who are eligible for a VA education benefit.
- » [Veterans Employment Toolkit](#): This toolkit is designed to provide Veterans with multiple resources to utilize during their job search, and career growth. The [Military Skills Translator](#) is another resource where you can input your service type and military job title to populate equivalent civilian skills and job openings.

Fine-tuning your resume is one of the most important parts of applying to jobs. That is your selling point – the way for recruiters to determine if you are the best candidate for their open position. Your resume should provide top level highlights of your career. While you may not always have direct experience, you can turn to your soft skills and highlight transferable skills and relevant coursework/volunteer work to demonstrate that you have the specific skills, experience, and accomplishments necessary to do the job.

RESUME TIPS AND TRICKS

- Keep your resume at one page.
- Include your contact information at the top.
- Describe skills and experiences in a way that directly aligns to the position, using words that are included in the job posting.
- Explain what you achieved in a quantifiable way to show what you have accomplished.
- Lay out the information in a visually appealing and neat format that is easily legible.
- Lead with action words. For example, use verbs like “managed”, “completed” and “authored”.
- Avoid using military terminology that might not be easily understood, such as acronyms, some rankings and duties.
- Proofread to ensure there are no grammar or spelling mistakes.

APPLYING

Once your resume is updated, the next step is to apply. When applying to a job, take time to understand what the company expects from applicants and customize your resume and cover letter for that specific job. When reviewing the job description, look for key words and skills specific to that role and find ways to highlight these skills in your application.

If the company allows for a cover letter, be sure to include one. Use the cover letter as the opportunity to showcase your personality and highlight why you are a good fit for the position. You can include accomplishments, skills, and experience and explain how you will be able to use those on the job to meet expectations. While your cover letter and resume may contain some of the same information, your cover letter should focus more on present and future goals.

Before hitting submit on a job application, check to make sure all your information is correct and download each final application to use as a resource. After you apply, it may be a few days or weeks before you hear back from the company on their decision. Do not get discouraged and use this time to continue your application process with other companies.

INTERVIEWING

If the company invites you to interview, it's important to take the time to prepare. Begin by researching the company and your interviewers. Make sure you have a solid understanding of the company's goals, values, and how your background makes you a good fit. Take the time to practice interviewing with your family, friends, or others in the industry. Practice answering some common interview and situational questions such as "tell me about yourself", and "why you are interested in this role" to ensure you have well prepared answers that reference key points from your resume.

When preparing for the interview, be ready to describe examples of your projects or past experiences. This can be a chance to explain your weaknesses and how you can manage and turn it in a positive direction. You can use the STAR (Situation, Task, Action and Result) method to tell stories concisely.



Situation	Describe the Situation you were in.
Task	Describe the Task you had to do including the expectations and challenges you faced.
Action	Describe the Action that you took and how you did it.
Result	Describe the Result of your actions. This is where you can highlight your accomplishments, achievements and impact.

It is also beneficial to have your salary expectations in mind in case you are asked about it. You can find similar salaries online to ensure your expectations align with the average salary for your industry. When it comes to the actual interview, make sure to keep eye contact, give a firm handshake and be engaged in the conversation. Feel free to bring some questions that you have about the role or company to discuss during the interview. Once the interview is complete, thank them for their time and make sure to send a follow-up email.

While you may not necessarily get the job after the follow up email, it is important to maintain the connection for the future. You may receive a job in the same industry and be working alongside people you interviewed with, so it is important to leave things on good terms. Think of each interview as a positive learning experience.

RECOGNIZE THIS IS A PROCESS

Stay positive during the job search process. Try not to get discouraged after sending out applications if you receive nothing in return and do not take it personally. In these kinds of situations, it is always difficult to tell how many people you are competing against or what their qualifications might be compared to yours. Look at each rejection as one step closer to getting a job and use this as a learning experience to help you improve for the next interview. It might be helpful to take some time to reflect on your interview process and find any possible gaps.

Some hiring managers may even be open to providing you feedback if you didn't get the role to provide suggestions for how you can better yourself as a candidate. Meet your challenges or setbacks with a constructive approach and focus on the learning opportunities that are created. This is a chance to further develop your skills and refine your job search strategy.

Starting a Business/ Entrepreneurship

The [U.S. Small Business Administration \(SBA\)](#) found that military service exhibits one of the largest marginal effects on self-employment, and Veterans are 45% more likely to be self-employed than non-Veterans. The SBA offers support for Veterans as they enter the world of business ownership. There is opportunity for funding programs, training, and federal contracting opportunities.

If you choose to start your own business, there are many support opportunities to help make your business a success. The Office of [Veterans Business Development \(OVBD\)](#) promotes Veteran entrepreneurship. OVBD provides access to capital and preparation for small business opportunities. Another option is the Vets First Verification Program, run by the [Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization \(OSDBU\)](#). If you register your Veteran-Owned Small Business with OSDBU, you may qualify for advantages when bidding on government contracts.

There are many Veteran Set-Asides that you can pursue as you continue the journey of building your business.

Additionally, you can research your local state Veterans Commission/Agency. Many states have large Veteran support structures in place to provide support for Veterans starting their own business. There are many support avenues available to Veteran-Owned businesses to help your business flourish.



Support Tools

There are numerous support tools and programs available for Veterans seeking meaningful careers.

- » [Grow with Google](#) has a [Veteran Program](#) that provides tools and resources designed to help transitioning service members, Veterans, and military spouses prepare for and build meaningful careers. This includes work from home opportunities, in addition to ways to grow your skills, job listings, and help with building your business.
- » [Hiring Our Heroes \(HOH\)](#) is an initiative by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. This is nationwide effort to connect Veterans, service members, and military spouses with meaningful employment opportunities. HOH leans on the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's vast network of state and local chambers as well as strategic partners from the public, private, and non-profit sectors.
- » Meta created the [Military and Veterans Hub](#) to provide support and build community. This hub contains tools and resources, success stories, trainings and events, as well as Facebook groups to join to build your network. In this hub, you can find online training on creating a Facebook page or Instagram account for your business and guides to using Facebook tools to engage customers and advertise your product to new audiences.
- » [Personalized Career Planning and Guidance \(Chapter 36\)](#) provides guidance and assistance with a professional who will help you develop a personalized career/educational plan based on your own unique goals.

Experts will:

1. Assess your skills, education, and training to help you determine your civilian career.
2. Find the best training program to meet your job goals.
3. Help you determine the right educational program and school based on your future plans.
4. Provide guidance on adjusting to the civilian world post-transition.

- » You may be eligible if you're leaving active service soon, if you've been discharged within the past year, or if you are a Veteran or dependent eligible for a VA educational benefit.
- » [Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership \(VITAL\) Program](#) provides on-campus clinical care and coordination among local VA medical centers, VBA, campus faculty and staff, and community resources to support well-being.
- » [The VA for Vets](#) initiative helps Veterans and transitioning military service members find meaningful careers and provides resources to support Veteran hiring.



Bridging Education and Employment

ON THE JOB

Attaining a job is the first step to launching your career. Once you have secured a job, growth does not stop there. To ensure continued success while employed, there are Veteran groups you can join to continue to grow your network and professional capabilities. Some companies have Veteran Resource Groups that allow you to collaborate and learn with your peers while in your professional role.

Continue to push yourself in your position as you focus on professional development. There may be a skill development program you can join at your company or look into additional learnings on your own. Individual and professional development can highlight your willingness to learn and commitment to not only the company, but also to being the best employee possible.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

As you continue to develop in your position, you should identify goals to build your career. You can use these goals to develop next steps and fill skills gaps to make you eligible for promotions.

For beneficiaries with remaining benefit eligibility, you can use the GI Bill for [independent and distance learning online](#) as you continue your learning. Additionally, you can use remaining entitlement to go back to school to receive a Master's degree.

CERTIFICATIONS & TESTING

If you're a Veteran and you qualify for the GI Bill, you may be able to use part of your entitlement to reimburse test fees up to \$2,000 for a job that requires a license or certification in order for you to work.

These [national tests](#) include approved college admissions tests, approved tests that you can take to earn college credits, approved graduate school admissions tests, and approved admissions tests for pre-health professional programs.



Find out which tests are covered and [how much they cost](#).





Additional Resources

There are a number of additional resources to support you in your pursuit of a meaningful career, including:

- » [On the Job Training Resources](#) help provide support during your career to help you achieve success and growth, such as work-study allowance that helps you earn while you learn.
- » [Veteran Readiness and Employment](#) provides resources to transition to civilian careers.
- » [USA Jobs](#) allows you to explore federal government hiring paths, with specific searches for Veterans and military spouses.
- » [U.S. Department of Labor's Veteran's Employment & Training Service](#) provides resources for Veterans to find a job or apprenticeship, as well as spousal employment support and resources for companies looking to hire Veterans.
- » [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) provides data on Veteran employment from demographics to industries.



Now that you have a good understanding of building your future with GI Bill, what's next? You can return to the GI Bill Series to review ["A Guide to Choosing Your Education Pathway"](#) and ["A Guide to Understanding Your Benefits"](#) or find more specific program information on [VA.gov](#).