

Colleagues, Community Leaders, and Fellow Veterans,

The Department of Veterans Affairs is committed to providing Veterans every opportunity they have earned. We bolstered our efforts during the implementation of the new Transition Assistance Program. We now have permanent Benefits Advisors at 106 military installations serving over 270 disparate bases ensuring we can have a global presence in our military installations. Ensuring a positive community involvement came through in our first report on Veteran economic opportunities – that report, *The 2015 Veteran Economic Opportunity Report* (link below) brought together data sources from across the federal government focused on meaningful employment, income, accessing education, and general economic indicators. We want to raise awareness about the value Veterans bring to a community and increase the number of education and employment opportunities for Veterans. We anticipate this report will help foster a dialog in several different areas and forums.

<http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/17007/new-economic-opportunity-report-informs-myva-innovation/>

Informed by this data, the VA is implementing a key initiative in over 20 U.S. cities to provide enhanced economic opportunities for Veterans and their families. This effort, titled **Communities of Interest**, is intended to develop strategies to build sustainable models over the next two years that will include:

- Training for employers on hiring and supporting Veterans
- Employment summits to connect talented job seekers with local employers who have immediate hiring needs – focused on the industry needs of that community
- Policy academies where experts generate ideas, form partnerships, and make policy recommendations that will help lower the unemployment rate and increase economic opportunities among Veterans and their families
- Learning or resource hubs to help connect Veterans to economic opportunities including entrepreneurship, credentialing and skills building

Each community will develop a unique strategy based on their particular economic opportunities. To assist, the VA will invest in economic liaisons to collaborate with government leaders, local agencies, businesses, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations to help connect and amplify available resources and support for Veterans and their families.

We are very excited about the Communities of Interest initiative. It will engage Veterans in the community where they can become a positive economic multiplier. Using their GI Bill® and other benefits they have earned, they become students ... homeowners ... entrepreneurs ... employees ... community leaders. It reinforces Secretary McDonald's MyVA initiative to expand strategic partnerships to help us coordinate Veteran-related issue with local, state and community partners – as well as VA employees.

This not only creates economic stability and opportunity for our Veterans – it translates into millions of dollars to that community's economy for all its citizens.

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VA Core Values: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, Excellence (“I CARE”)

Please Remember:

- If you would like to review prior messages sent through this listserv, click http://benefits.va.gov/vow/economic_opportunity.htm.
- If you would like to research, find, access, and, in time, manage your VA benefits and personal information please visit and/or register at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/ebenefits.portal>.
- If you looking for a job or an employer committed to hiring Veterans, please register on the Veterans Employment Center (VEC) at: <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/jobs>
- If you are seeking employment in the federal government, particularly the VA, our VA for Vets high-tech tools and resources can help. Visit online at <http://vaforvets.va.gov/> or call 1-855-824-8387.

If you would like to contact us about your VA education benefits:

You can send us a secure email that will usually be answered within 48 hours. You can also search for answers to frequently asked questions and register to be notified of any updates to the information. This contact method is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and can also be utilized worldwide. Click here to enter the "Ask A Question" site or here to review our frequently asked questions.

You can call 1-888-GIBILL-1 (1-888-442-4551). This line only accepts calls from 7:00 AM - 7:00 PM central time Monday – Friday.