

Veterans Economic Communities Initiative (VECI) Pilot: 2016 Program Report and Highlights

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
1.1 Past Reports.....	3
1.2 This Report.....	3
2. Veteran National Landscape.....	5
2.1 Veteran Data Sources.....	5
2.2 The Veteran Pipeline.....	7
2.3 Veteran Population Size and Period of Service.....	8
2.4 Selected Demographics – All Veterans.....	10
2.5 Selected Demographics – Post-9/11 Veterans.....	11
2.6 Education Levels – All Veterans.....	12
2.7 Education Levels – Post-9/11 Veterans.....	13
2.8 Changing Economic Opportunities through the Post-9/11 GI Bill.....	13
2.9 Economic Outcomes – Median Wages.....	21
2.10 Economic Outcomes – Industries That Employ Veterans.....	22
2.11 Economic Outcomes – Unemployment Rates.....	23
3. Public-Private Partnerships.....	24
4. Veterans Economic Communities Initiative Overview.....	27
4.1 Mission and Objective.....	27
4.2 Selection Criteria.....	28
4.3 Strategies.....	29
4.3.1 Outreach and Engagement.....	29
4.3.2 Veterans Employment Center™ Adoption.....	29
4.3.3 Upskilling and Education.....	30
5. Community Snapshots by VECI Location.....	32
6. Summary.....	33
6.1 Looking to the Future.....	33
7. Appendix: Data Sources and Additional Data.....	34
7.1 Differences in Data Sources.....	34
7.2 Numeric Counts.....	35

1. Introduction

1.1 Past Reports

In January 2015, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) published the 2015 *Veteran Economic Opportunity Report* to provide data on indicators of the possible success of ongoing initiatives and barriers to economic competitiveness for Veterans. In addition to providing demographic information about the Veteran population, the report included data related to employment and earnings, education, homeownership, and use of benefits. Among the report's key findings:

- About half of the separating Post-9/11 Veterans face a period of unemployment.
- Veterans want to work, and Post-9/11 Veterans with jobs are doing better than their non-Veteran peers in earnings.
- The Post-9/11 GI Bill® is a key strategy to improving economic opportunities for Veterans and their families.

1.2 This Report

In this 2016 *Veteran Economic Opportunity Report* focusing on the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative (VECI), VA is providing a condensed update of the national portrait of the Veteran population, offering a framework and context for a deep dive into the strategy, activities, lessons learned, and promising practices of the program's first year. VECI was a pilot program to offer tailored local solutions that would improve Veterans' economic success in 25 of the most populated metropolitan areas across the country. The pilot's efforts and accomplishments were built on a foundation of strong existing programs in each VECI community and enjoyed the unwavering support of numerous local champions. The VECI pilot reflected VA's commitment to implementing data-driven programs and to understanding and responding to the needs of Veterans in the communities where they live and work. A large part of VECI's efforts during the pilot was increasing the use of earned benefits and extending and promoting the public-private partnerships (P3) that VA is increasingly using to leverage resources in support of Veterans.

The VECI pilot sought to achieve several key strategic goals:

- Test the ability of VA to leverage its scale in amplifying adoption of existing interagency programs that improve economic opportunities for transitioning Servicemembers (TSMs) and their families. These programs include the Vets.gov web portal and the Veterans Employment Center™ (VEC), the 8 Keys to Veterans' Success initiative, registered apprenticeship efforts, and P3s.
- Create national P3s with organizations that are not seeking funding from the VA and that are in a position to provide support at no cost to Veterans. These partnerships would be codified in memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and ideally be available to TSMs, Veterans, and their families, regardless of era of service.
- Increase evidence-driven policies at the local and national level by releasing open data that integrate Veteran economic opportunity indicators for all Veterans, as well as specifically focusing on Post-9/11 era Veterans.
- Pilot a place-based (community-driven) outreach and engagement initiative performance-managed via enterprise metrics.
- Create a platform where Veteran service providers, community leaders, philanthropists, and policy experts across the nation can share best practices and gain access to the latest information on issues related to Veterans' economic opportunities.

Table 1 highlights some of the contributions the VECl pilot provided. Consistent targets in each of the VECl communities provided an opportunity for VA to share best practices, build knowledge capital, and analyze work processes to improve quality, timeliness, and efficiency. VA's strategy depended on understanding the results of previous actions and pivoting, when necessary, to bring greater cohesion among activities and improved results for Veterans at the community level.

Table 1. High-Level VECl Results

Outreach and Engagement	VEC™ Registered Employers	VEC™ Positions Committed to Hire	Public-Private Partnerships
Over 190,000 community stakeholders engaged, including local government leaders, businesses, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations.	Over 19,500 registered employers made their jobs visible via the Vets.gov platform.	Over 1.2 million positions committed to hire Veterans, and about 743,000 Veterans hired since the VEC™ launch.	Approximately \$1 billion worth of available services, connecting TSMs, Veterans, and their families with an array of valuable services and tools without additional cost to taxpayers.

The following sections of this report provide a high-level update of the Veteran national landscape, including demographics, education levels, Post-9/11 GI Bill use, and economic outcomes. With this national portrait in mind, the report then provides a review of VA's P3s: policy tools that VA is using in new ways to better support Veterans and ensure their economic competitiveness in the long term. The final sections of the report provide the intentions, strategies, activities, and promising practices of the pilot's first year.

2. Veteran National Landscape

As noted in the original *2015 Veteran Economic Opportunity Report*, it is impossible to evaluate economic competitiveness of Veterans without initial base-line data and information that clarify the landscape of current economic outcomes of Veterans and TSMs. The following sections provide an update to some of the key data discussed in the 2015 report in order to better understand the success of ongoing initiatives and identify possible barriers to Veterans' economic competitiveness, as well as to inform policy, guide improvement strategies, and effectively communicate national priorities. Like the 2015 report, this update focuses on Veterans of the Post-9/11 era as they compare with Veterans of all other eras and with the non-Veteran population.

2.1 Veteran Data Sources

While this report is a follow-on to the *2015 Veteran Economic Opportunity Report*, not all of the data have been updated and reported here. The first report focused on establishing a base line of the Veteran population in the United States over the past few decades. The current report takes a different approach and focuses on the characteristics of Veterans in local communities in recent years in comparison to national Veteran data. The data in this report provide an overview of Veterans at the national and Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) levels based on publicly available data sources. Emphasis was placed on providing the most accurate current data at a local level for Veterans when choosing data sources. This section provides an overview of the main data sources considered for this report and the explanation for the chosen sources; it is not meant to provide an exhaustive listing of all Veteran data sources available.

National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

The National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS) is the authoritative clearinghouse within VA that collects, validates, analyzes, and disseminates key statistics on Veteran population and VA programs to support planning, analysis, and decision-making activities. The Veteran Population Projection Model 2014 (VetPop2014) maintained by NCVAS contains the latest official Veteran population projection from VA. VetPop2014 is an actuarial projection model developed by the Office of the Actuary for Veteran population projection from Fiscal Year 2014 through Fiscal Year 2043.¹

VetPop2014 contains data at the county, congressional district, state, and national levels. The focus of this report was at the MSA geographic level, corresponding to the geographic boundaries that defined each of the 25 initial VECL communities. Data on Veteran populations in the VetPop2014 was not used in this report because the desired Veteran demographics reported here cannot be derived at the MSA level from the VetPop 2014 model. In the appendices to the report, the MSA Data Summaries include county-level VetPop2014 data aggregated for each MSA.

Bureau of Labor Statistics

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), an agency within the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), is the principal federal agency responsible for measuring labor market activity, working conditions, and price changes in the economy. Its mission is to collect, analyze, and disseminate essential economic information to support public and private decision-making. The Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) program is a federal-state cooperative effort in which monthly estimates of total employment and unemployment provide key indicators of local economic conditions. The concepts and definitions underlying LAUS data come from the Current Population Survey (CPS), the household survey that is the source of the national unemployment rate. The CPS is a monthly survey of households that provides a comprehensive body of data on the labor force, employment, unemployment, persons not in the labor force, hours of work, earnings, and other demographic and labor force characteristics.²

1 <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/index.asp>

2 <http://www.bls.gov/>

The BLS CPS includes demographic data for Veteran populations broken out by period of service, while other data sources do not. In this report, all Post-9/11 Veteran demographic data come from the BLS CPS. When analyzing unemployment rates, data presented by LAUS are the most current. The LAUS produced by BLS provide as close to real-time data as possible at the MSA level. For this reason, annual unemployment rates from BLS are used in this report whenever possible. BLS does not produce Veteran unemployment rates at the MSA level. No statistical testing was conducted on comparative statements using BLS data.

Census Bureau

The Census Bureau's mission is to serve as the leading source of quality data about the nation's people and economy. The American Community Survey (ACS) provided by the Census Bureau is the premier source for detailed information about the American people and workforce. Through the ACS, more is known about jobs and occupations, educational attainment, Veterans, whether people own or rent their home, and other topics. Public officials, planners, and entrepreneurs use this information to assess the past and plan for the future.³

The latest year of release for the ACS is 2014, and estimates are provided at the one-year and five-year (2010–2014) levels. The five-year ACS estimates provide the lowest level of error at the MSA level for Veterans. Since the focus of this report is on providing accurate Veteran data at the MSA level, the five-year ACS estimates were used for Veteran demographics whenever possible. One exception to this is Veteran unemployment rates: As the five-year estimates span multiple years and could skew employment statistics, one-year estimates from the ACS are presented for Veteran unemployment rates for all MSAs. All comparative statements using ACS data have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

As described above, there are diverse sources of data on the demographics and economic circumstances of Veterans. Each source uses a unique methodology and has certain limitations. The sources most widely cited throughout this report were carefully selected to align with the geographic footprint of the VEI communities in the pilot.

³ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>

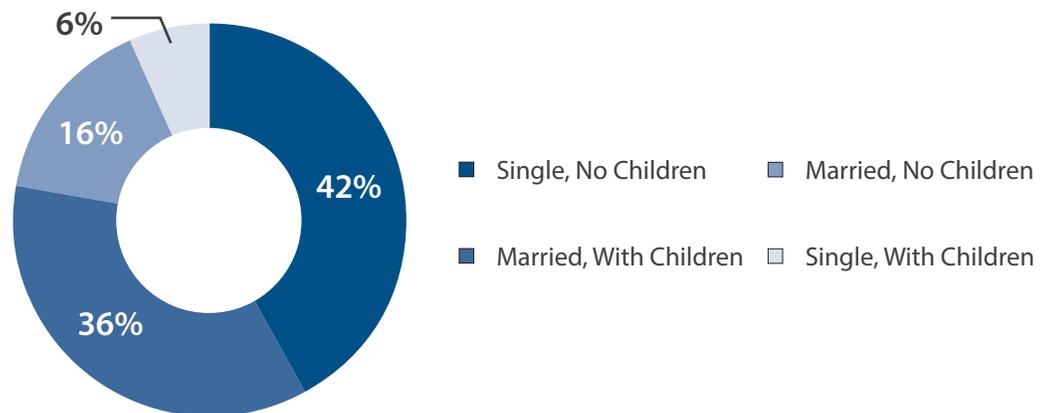
2.2 The Veteran Pipeline

To better understand the Veteran population, the current military force and TSM population must be taken into account. Each year from 2010 through 2014, an average of 309,000 Servicemembers transitioned from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to life in the private sector. Ninety percent of the population of active duty and Selected Reserve⁴ TSMs (an annual average of 279,000) are enlisted personnel, and 10 percent (an annual average of 30,000) serve or served as officers.⁵

The educational backgrounds of active duty and Selected Reserve TSMs are similar. Within the enlisted cohort, about 7 percent of active duty and 10 percent of Selected Reserve populations have a bachelor's or higher degree; 92 percent of active duty and 83 percent of Selected Reserve enlisted TSMs have a high school diploma and/or some college experience. The majority of officers (84 percent of active duty and 87 percent of the Selected Reserve) have a bachelor's or higher degree.⁶

From 1995 through 2014, the percentage of total active duty enlisted personnel who had a bachelor's and/or an advanced degree increased from 3 percent to 7 percent, but the percentage of officers with a bachelor's or advanced degree decreased from 90 percent to 84 percent.⁷ The trend for the Selected Reserve was similar, except that trend was positive for both enlisted and officer personnel: The percentage of enlisted personnel increased from 7 percent to 10 percent, and the percentage of officers increased from 80 percent to 87 percent.⁸

Figure 1. Family Status – 2014 DoD Demographics⁹



In the active duty and Selected Reserve population, there are 2.8 million family members, including spouses, children, and adult dependents. As noted in **Figure 1**, in 2014 42 percent of military personnel overall had children (a slight increase from 40 percent in 2000).

⁴ All Reserve and Guard manpower are assigned to one of three Reserve component categories: the Ready Reserve, the Standby Reserve, and the Retired Reserve. The Ready Reserve comprises the Selected Reserve, the Individual Ready Reserve, and the Inactive National Guard. Selected Reserve members train year-round and participate annually in active duty training exercises.

⁵ Military OneSource Demographic Reports, 2010–2014

⁶ Ibid

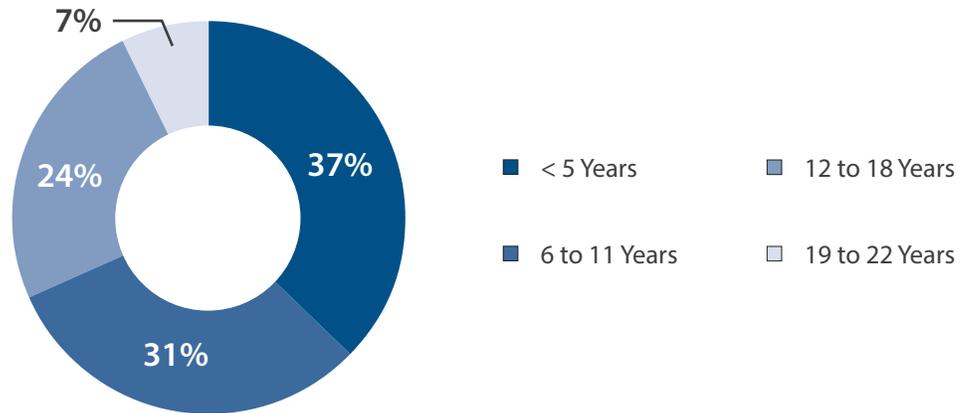
⁷ All reported differences are statistically significant at the 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$).

⁸ Military OneSource Demographic Reports, 2010–2014

⁹ Ibid

More than half of military personnel are married. Of the 1 million military spouses, nearly one-quarter are ages 26–30; 21 percent are age 25 or younger, 21 percent are ages 31–35, 14 percent are ages 36–40, and 20 percent are age 41 or older.¹⁰

Figure 2. Child Dependent Ages – 2014 DoD Demographics¹¹

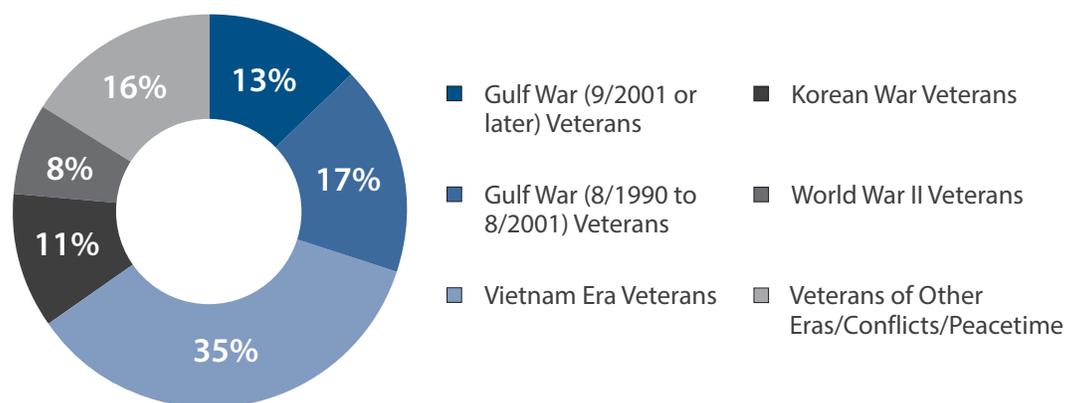


Of the nearly 2 million military children counted in 2014, roughly 70 percent were under the age of 11. As noted in **Figure 2**, the largest number were younger than 5 years old (37 percent), followed by 6- to 11-year-olds (31 percent). Military children ages 12–18 comprised nearly one-quarter of the population (24 percent); the smallest age band was 19–22 (7 percent).¹²

2.3 Veteran Population Size and Period of Service

There are an estimated 20.7 million Veterans in the United States (comprising 9 percent of the U.S. population over the age of 18).¹³ **Figure 3** shows the breakdown of the Veteran population by period of service, noting that the largest segment of the Veteran population is from the Vietnam era — a cohort larger than the Post-9/11 and Gulf War cohorts combined.¹⁴

Figure 3. Veterans by Period of Service¹⁵



¹⁰ Military OneSource Demographic Reports, 2010–2014

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Children ages 21–22 must be enrolled as full-time students to qualify as dependents.

¹³ Census Bureau five-year estimates 2010–2014 ACS

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

The VEI pilot supported **5.9 million** Veterans, or about **29 percent** of the Veteran population.*

* Data according to Census Bureau five-year estimates 2010–2014 ACS

While the largest segment of the Veteran population served in the Vietnam era, the Post-9/11 Veteran population is significantly younger and is growing the fastest, as seen in **Table 2**. Coupled with described military dependent demographics, a focus on enabling Veterans and their families to take control of their own economic outcomes is a valuable long-term strategy — for both Veterans and VA.

Table 2. Veteran Period of Service Changes Over Time¹⁶

Period of Service	2005–2009 Veteran Population	2010–2014 Veteran Population	Percent Change*
Post-9/11	7.7%	12.8%	5.1% ●
Pre-9/11	14.7%	17.3%	2.6% ●
Vietnam War	33.8%	35.3%	1.5% ●
Korean War	13.1%	11.0%	-2.1% ●
World War II	12.9%	7.7%	-5.2% ●

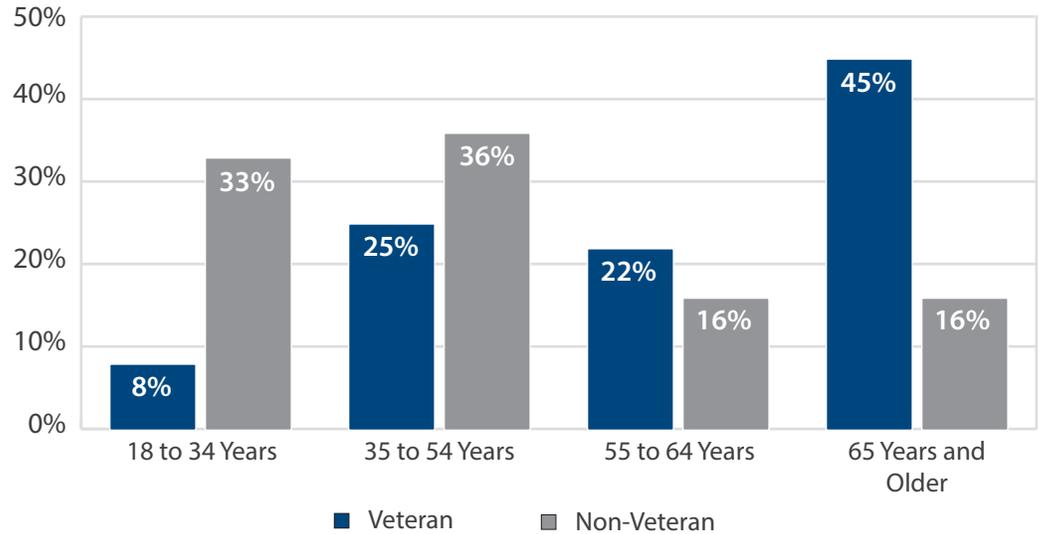
*Percent changes are differences in percentages to show how the population distribution has changed over time. Dot indicates how the 2010-2014 population compares with the 2005-2009 population. Red represents a lower percentage than in 2005-2009. Green represents a higher percentage than in 2005-2009. Dash represents no statistically significant difference.

¹⁶ Census Bureau five-year estimates 2010–2014 and 2005–2009

2.4 Selected Demographics – All Veterans

Veterans as a whole are older than the general population, which is understandable, given that the largest cohorts served during and before the Vietnam era. **Figure 4** demonstrates that, 67 percent of the Veteran population is older than age 55, compared with 31 percent of the non-Veteran population.

Figure 4. Population by Veteran Status and Age¹⁷



Male Veterans make up more than 90 percent of the Veteran population, compared with only 44 percent of the non-Veteran population, as indicated in **Table 3**. The percentage of female Veterans, while low in relation to the non-Veteran population, increased by nearly a full percentage point from 2005–2009 to 2010–2014.¹⁸

Table 3. Population by Gender¹⁹

Gender	2005–2009 Veteran Population	2010–2014 Veteran Population	2010–2014 Non-Veteran Population
Male	93.1%	92.4%	44.3%
Female	6.9%	7.6%	55.7%

¹⁷ Census Bureau five-year estimates 2010–2014 ACS

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Census Bureau five-year estimates 2010–2014 and 2005–2009

The proportions of racial and ethnic groups in the Veteran population differs from the proportions in the general population (**Table 4**).

Table 4. Population by Race/Ethnicity²⁰

Race/Ethnicity	Veteran Population	Non-Veteran Population
White	83.8%	74.8%
Black or African American	11.2%	12.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native*	0.7%	0.8%
Asian	1.3%	5.5%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander*	0.1%	0.2%
Some other race/ethnicity	1.2%	4.5%
Two or more races/ethnicities	1.6%	2.0%
Hispanic or Latino	5.8%	15.6%

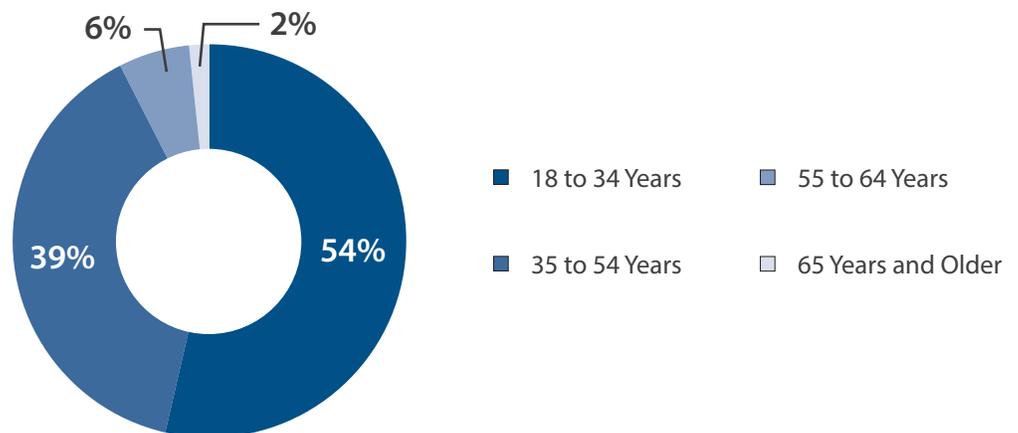
*Not a statistically significant difference

2.5 Selected Demographics – Post-9/11 Veterans

The ACS does not report demographic data for Veterans by specific periods of service. For Post-9/11 Veteran demographics, BLS CPS data were used in this report. While the primary function of the CPS is to provide labor force statistics, Veteran demographics by period of service are also provided at the national level. All data in the national landscape regarding Post-9/11 Veterans come from the CPS.

Of the Post-9/11 cohort, more than half (54 percent) were between ages 18 and 34; only 7 percent were older than 55 (**Figure 5**).²¹

Figure 5. Post-9/11 Veteran Population by Age²²



²⁰ Census Bureau five-year estimates 2010–2014 ACS

²¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey, 2015 Annual Averages

²² Ibid

Also, while the proportion of women in the Veteran population is smaller than the proportion in the general population, their presence is larger in the Post-9/11 cohort, representing 18 percent of this Veteran population. The proportion was similar in 2010.²³

Racial diversity within the Post-9/11 cohort appears to be more proportionally aligned with national averages (**Table 5**). While all the racial categories listed in the ACS data cited above are not available, **Table 5** summarizes the available data in the CPS for Post-9/11 era Veterans, indicating small changes from 2010 to 2015.

Table 5. Population by Race/Ethnicity for Post-9/11 Veterans Over Time²⁴

Race/Ethnicity	2010 Percentage of Post-9/11 Veterans	2015 Percentage of Post-9/11 Veterans
White	74.2%	73.8% ●
Black or African American	15.2%	13.3% ●
Hispanic or Latino	10.6%	12.7% ●

Dot indicates how the 2015 population compares with the 2010 population. Red represents a lower percentage than in 2010. Green represents a higher percentage than in 2010. Dash represents no percent change.

2.6 Education Levels – All Veterans

For certain levels of educational attainment (high school diploma and less than a bachelor’s degree), Veterans and non-Veterans generally have the same levels of education (**Table 6**). While there are proportionally more Veterans who have had some exposure to a college education, a smaller percentage of them have obtained a bachelor’s degree when compared with non-Veterans.²⁵

Table 6. Educational Attainment Levels²⁶

Level of Educational Attainment	Veteran Population	Non-Veteran Population
Less than high school diploma	7.4%	14.4%
High school diploma (includes GED)	29.3%	27.9%
Some college OR associate degree	36.6%	28.2%
Bachelor’s degree or higher	26.6%	29.5%

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Census Bureau five-year estimates 2010–2014 ACS

²⁶ Ibid

2.7 Education Levels – Post-9/11 Veterans

Data for the education attainment of Post-9/11 Veterans is available from the CPS only for those ages 25 and older. Compared with other Veteran and non-Veteran groups (**Table 7**), fewer Post-9/11 Veterans have less than a high school diploma, and the percentage attaining a bachelor’s degree or higher is increasing.²⁷ This coincides with the rollout of the Post-9/11 GI Bill® and is supported by increased use of that program. In Fiscal Year 2010, 365,640 beneficiaries received Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. By Fiscal Year 2015, that number increased to 790,507.²⁸

Table 7. Educational Attainment Levels for Post-9/11 Veterans Over Time²⁹

Level of Educational Attainment	2010 Percentage of Post-9/11 Veterans	2015 Percentage of Post-9/11 Veterans
Less than high school diploma	0.8%	0.1% ●
High school diploma (includes GED)	26.1%	20.7% ●
Some college OR associate degree	45.3%	44.1% ●
Bachelor’s degree or higher	27.7%	33.8% ●

Dot indicates how the 2015 population compares with the 2010 population. Red represents a lower percentage than in 2010. Green represents a higher percentage than in 2010. Dash represents no percent change.

2.8 Changing Economic Opportunities through the Post-9/11 GI Bill

One of VA’s benefit programs to support TSMs and their families is the Post-9/11 GI Bill. A detailed analysis of the data for Post-9/11 GI Bill beneficiaries provides useful information on what Veterans are studying, where they are studying, and which demographic groups are most likely to use the benefit. Data on Post-9/11 GI Bill usage are available through VA’s Chapter 33 LTS database. Limitations to the data include an inability to distinguish between classroom and distance learners. While some institutions are known to be online-only institutions, many institutions offer both online and brick-and-mortar classes. It is impossible to distinguish between students attending in person or online; thus all students are included in the analysis. Institutions are mapped to MSAs based on the ZIP code provided in VA’s CH33 LTS database. While this may lead to overinflated MSA numbers in later sections, it is important to note the prevalence of institutions offering distance learning within local communities.

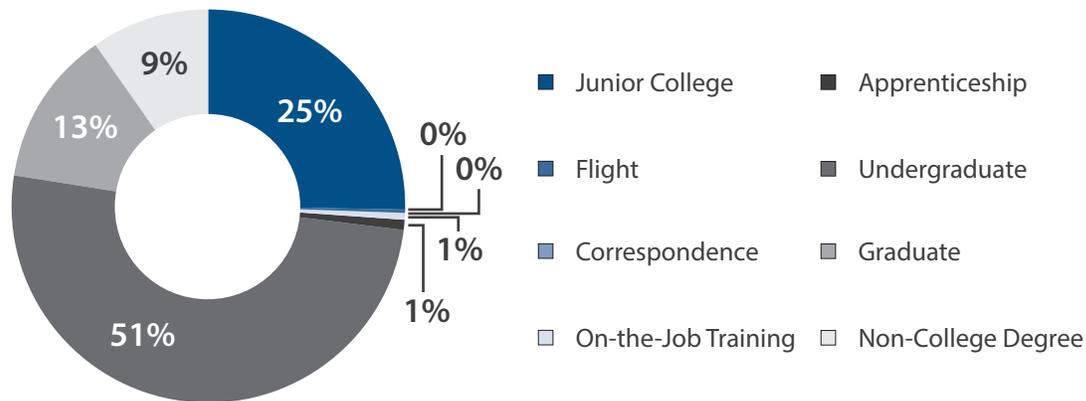
²⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey, 2015 Annual Averages

²⁸ Veterans Benefits Administration Annual Benefit Reports, 2014 and 2015

²⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey, 2015 Annual Averages, population 25 years old or older

From 2010 through 2014, an average of 622,000 people used the benefit each year.³⁰ In Fiscal Year 2015, over 790,000³¹ individuals used the Post-9/11 GI Bill — a usage rate of about 30 percent of the Post-9/11 population as defined by ACS.

Figure 6. Training Type³²



For purposes of this report, the 2010–2014 five-year American Community Survey (ACS) approximation of the Gulf War (9/2001 or later) Veteran population is considered representative of the entire population that is eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The ACS data were chosen because there is no single data source that lists who is eligible to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and the ACS has the geographic versatility to be analyzed nationally and at the MSA level.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit can be used to pursue higher education or job-training opportunities. In Fiscal Year 2015, the vast majority of students used the benefit for undergraduate or community college programs (**Figure 6**).³³ There is room to increase use of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in the apprenticeship and on-the-job training categories, although the number of students who are able to use the benefit for job training is limited by the number of apprenticeship programs offered by participating employers. The VECE communities asked local employers to register their apprenticeships and increase the number of such opportunities available to Servicemembers and Veterans.

30 Fiscal Year 2014 Education ABR, <http://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/ABR-Education-FY14-10202015.pdf>

31 Fiscal Year 2015 Education ABR

32 Chapter 33 LTS, Fiscal Year 2015

33 Ibid

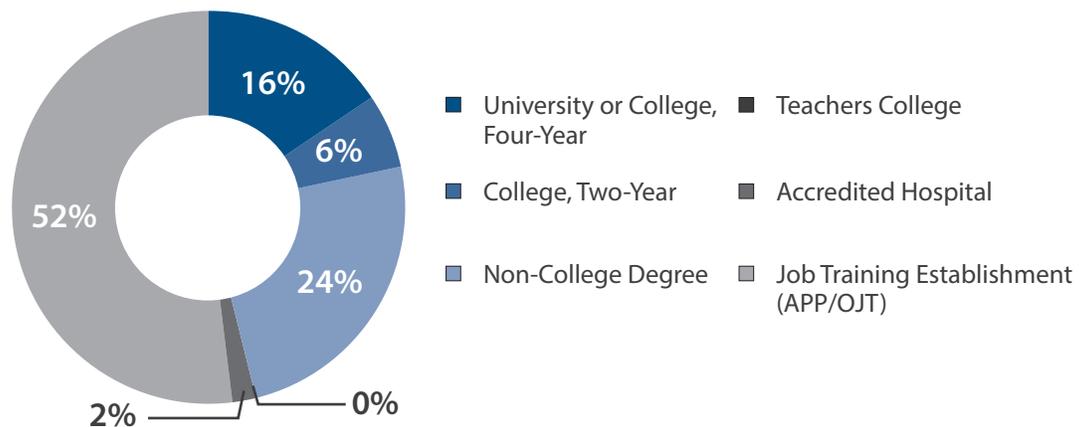
In Fiscal Year 2015, Post-9/11 GI Bill students participated in more than 50,000 unique programs in 189 categories. **Table 8** lists the top five categories by number of students. The aggregate student population of these categories is about 14 percent of the Post-9/11 student population. There are also 23,400 students enrolled in programs in the category of “other,” which denotes less common programs; almost all the programs listed as “other” had fewer than 50 students in Fiscal Year 2015.³⁴

Table 8. Fiscal Year 2015 Post-9/11 GI Bill, Top Fields of Study³⁵

	Program Names	Students
1	Undeclared / General Studies	40,970
2	Business Administration	25,148
3	Criminal Justice	19,705
4	Sciences	14,931
5	Nursing	11,606

The Post-9/11 GI Bill enables Servicemembers and Veterans to attend institutions of higher learning and/or job-training programs all over the country. VA has approved the use of education benefits at 42,046 institutions. The largest portion of institutions is the job-training establishment category (**Figure 7**). In Fiscal Year 2015, about 14 percent of all job-training establishments employed a Post-9/11 GI Bill student.³⁶

Figure 7. Types of Educational Institutions³⁷



The usage rate may be low because VA data include all job-training establishments used across all VA benefits, and the data are not bounded by time. The large proportion of job-training establishments should enable eligible Servicemembers and Veterans to pursue apprenticeships or on-the-job training programs through their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits.

34 Chapter 33 LTS, Fiscal Year 2015

35 Ibid

36 Ibid

37 Ibid

All institutions in this analysis were ranked by student population. The three highest-ranked institutions were located within the VECl pilot communities, as determined by their ZIP codes in the CH33 LTS database. The top five institutions (**Table 9**) and their students make up 9 percent of the Post-9/11 GI Bill student population. It is difficult to decipher the number of students enrolled in online degree programs because the VA system does not include a delineation for online programs and many institutions provide classes both online and in traditional classroom settings. A large number of the programs at these institutions are not specified and fall into the “undeclared” or “general studies” category.³⁸

Table 9. Top Post-9/11 GI Bill Institutions by Student Population in Fiscal Year 2015³⁹

	Institution Name	Location MSA	Students	Undergraduate	Graduate	Top Program of Study
1	University of Phoenix – Online Campus	Phoenix, AZ*	22,614	85%	15%	Criminal Justice
2	American Public University System	Washington, DC*	15,228	79%	21%	Management
3	University of Maryland – University College	Washington, DC*	11,645	80%	21%	Business Administration
4	Ashford University – Online	Clinton, IA	8,739	89%	13%	Business Administration
5	Liberty University	Lynchburg, VA	7,545	62%	40%	Criminal Justice

*Indicates a VECl community location

The VA GI Bill Comparison Tool provides outcome measures for all VA-approved institutions. The GI Bill Comparison Tool updates periodically. For purposes of this report, all data were provided by the 13 July 2016 update. VA tracks each institution and campus by a VA Institution ID number. The GI Bill Comparison Tool provides data for all students based on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) ID for an institution. Since institutions are tracked differently in the two systems, VA can provide campus-level data for Veterans where IPEDS data are not always available.

GI Bill Comparison Tool data notes:

- The Outcome Measure Tool data are based on first-time Post-9/11 GI Bill Servicemembers and Veterans who have not used prior education benefits. Enrollments at flight schools and correspondence facilities were not included.
- Data consist of only Post-9/11 GI Bill enrollments beginning on 1 August 2009. They are updated annually in September.
- All metrics are reported by school and by academic year, which begins on August 1 and ends July 31 of the next calendar year.
- For students with multiple degree/certificate records, the first reported degree/certificate is used to calculate metrics.
- The graduation rate metrics for four-year institutions of higher learning will not be published until the end of six-year, 150 percent (September 2016) and eight-year, 200 percent (September 2018) time frames.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/comparison_tool/about_this_tool.asp

The Post-9/11 GI Bill program is relatively new, having begun in Fiscal Year 2009. **Table 10** shows the outcome measures for the top five institutions enrolling students who are using this benefit. These institutions had graduation rates ranging from 12 percent to 42 percent for all students. While Veteran graduation rates appear to be low for all two-year institutions, Veteran retention rates are much higher than the institutional averages. As additional data become available for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, further analysis could be conducted to determine the reason behind the disparity between Veteran graduation and retention rates.⁴¹

Table 10. Outcome Measures⁴²

	Institution	Veteran Graduation Rate*	Graduation Rate for All Students	Veteran Retention Rate	Retention Rate for All Students	Repayment Rate for All Students
1	University of Phoenix – Online Campus	N/A	N/A	76%	N/A	N/A
2	American Public University System	N/A	34%	79%	84%	60%
3	University of Maryland – University College	N/A	4%	75%	36%	66%
4	Ashford University – Online	N/A	21%	86%	36%	43%
5	Liberty University	N/A	48%	86%	69%	69%

*Veteran graduation rates for four-year institutions will not be available until September 2016.

N/A indicates that the data do not exist or are insufficient.

This table refers to first-time Post-9/11 GI Bill Servicemembers and Veterans who have not used prior education benefits. Enrollments at flight schools and correspondence facilities were not included.

41 GI Bill Comparison Tool, updated July 2016, data reflect the 2014–2015 academic year

42 Ibid

About 28 percent of the over 10,000 job-training programs in Fiscal Year 2015 were located within the VEI pilot communities, as determined by their ZIP codes in the CH33 LTS database. The Economic Liaisons in each VEI community worked to increase the number of job-training programs available to Veterans through the Post-9/11 GI Bill in collaboration with DOL. There are many unique job-training opportunities that large and small employers offer to Veterans. The top 10 job-training establishments (by student population) in Fiscal Year 2015 account for 19 percent of all the students enrolled in job-training programs (**Table 11**). Among job-training programs, the transportation industry has the largest footprint — seven of the top 10 job-training establishments and 10 of the top 25. In fact, while the average establishment offers fewer than four opportunities in a year, these top seven transportation companies offered an average of 271. The top 10 offered an average of 108.⁴³

Table 11. Job-Training Establishments With Highest Post-9/11 GI Bill Student Enrollment, Fiscal Year 2015⁴⁴

	Job-Training Establishments	Students	Location
1	Werner Enterprises	520	Omaha, NE
2	Schneider National	511	Green Bay, WI
3	TMC Transportation	459	Des Moines, IA
4	Roehl Transport	143	Marshfield, WI
5	Stevens Transport	117	Dallas, TX*
6	Covenant Transport	87	Chattanooga, TN
7	New York City Fire Department	82	New York, NY*
8	Puget Sound Naval Shipyard	65	Bremerton, WA
9	Maverick Transportation LLC	60	Little Rock, AR
10	Florida Department Of Corrections Region II	60	Jacksonville, FL*

*Indicates a VEI Location

43 Chapter 33 LTS, Fiscal Year 2015

44 Ibid

The Post-9/11 GI Bill can be used by active duty Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families. The demographics of the users vary greatly, depending on whether the individuals are Servicemembers or family members. The overwhelming majority of individuals use the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit for themselves, with family members accounting for only 17 percent of the student population (**Table 12**). Generally, family members are younger (with the highest age concentration of beneficiaries at age 18) and female (69 percent), while Veteran students are slightly older (with the highest age concentration of beneficiaries at age 24) and male (79 percent).⁴⁵

Table 12. Post-9/11 GI Bill User Demographics, Fiscal Year 2015⁴⁶

Demographic	All	Veteran	Family Members	Active Duty
All	790,507	70%	17%	13%
Male	71%	79%	31%	77%
Female	29%	21%	69%	23%
Under 18	0%	0%	2%	0%
18 to 34	73%	76%	86%	43%
35 to 54	25%	23%	12%	51%
55 to 64	1%	1%	0%	5%
65 to 74	0%	0%	0%	0%
Over 75	0%	0%	0%	0%
Peak Age	27	24	18	30

⁴⁵ Chapter 33 LTS, Fiscal Year 2015 and VA DoD Identity Repository

⁴⁶ Ibid

Military-specific demographics were pulled from the VA-DoD Identity Repository for Servicemember, Veteran, and dependent students using the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The military demographics for dependents reflect the demographics of the Servicemember or Veteran who sponsored the benefit. Due to the flexibility of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, a sponsor may also be a user of the benefit and could be counted twice. As seen in **Table 13**, the large majority of students were current or former enlisted Servicemembers. Warrant officers and commissioned officers were sponsors at a much higher rate, but the majority still used the benefit for themselves.⁴⁷

Table 13. Fiscal Year 2015 Post-9/11 GI Bill, Population by Sponsor, Enlisted, and Officers⁴⁸

Military Rank	Military Sponsor	Military User	Total
Enlisted	8%	92%	578,895
Warrant Officer	32%	68%	5,744
Commissioned Officer	35%	65%	44,279

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

2.9 Economic Outcomes – Median Wages

Median income was higher among Veterans than non-Veterans, even when separating for gender (Tables 14 and 15). In fact, median income for female Veterans was nearly the same level as the median income of non-Veteran males (and higher than the median income of the entire non-Veteran population). While median income for female Veterans was lower than that of male Veterans, the difference between male and female Veteran incomes was smaller than the gap between male and female non-Veterans.⁴⁹

Table 14. Veteran Median Income⁵⁰

Gender	Veterans 2005–2009	Veterans 2010–2014	Change*
Entire Population	\$40,199	\$37,466	-7% ●
Males	\$40,838	\$37,937	-7% ●
Females	\$32,024	\$32,057	0% —

*Percent changes based on raw income numbers. Dot indicates how the median incomes of the Veterans in 2010–2014 compare with the 2005–2009 incomes of the Veteran population. Red represents a lower income than in 2005–2009. Green represents a higher income than in 2005–2009. Dash represents no statistically significant difference.

Table 15. Non-Veteran Median Income⁵¹

Gender	Non-Veterans 2005–2009	Non-Veterans 2010–2014	Change*
Entire Population	\$27,877	\$26,214	-6% ●
Males	\$35,659	\$32,727	-8% ●
Females	\$22,555	\$21,758	-4% ●

*Percent changes based on raw income numbers. Dot indicates how the median incomes of the non-Veterans in 2010–2014 compare with the 2005–2009 incomes of the non-Veteran population. Red represents a lower income than in 2005–2009. Green represents a higher income than in 2005–2009. Dash represents no statistically significant difference.

⁴⁹ ACS five-year estimates, 2014 inflation-adjusted dollars using the BLS CPI Inflation Calculator

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

2.10 Economic Outcomes – Industries That Employ Veterans

The top five non-farm industries in terms of the number of Veterans employed in 2015 were similar across all Veteran demographic groups and the Post-9/11 cohort (**Table 16**). Possibly because of policy changes that enhance federal government recruitment of Veterans (Executive Order 13518), in 2015 the federal government employed the largest percentage of the Veteran population.⁵²

Table 16. Top Industries for Employing Veterans in 2015⁵³

Top 10 Industries for Employing Veterans	All Veterans	Non-Veterans	Post-9/11 Veterans
Government	21.4%	13.5%	26.4%
Federal	9.2%	2.0%	14.3%
State	4.9%	4.7%	4.9%
Local	7.4%	6.8%	7.2%
Manufacturing	12.7%	9.9%	11.7%
Professional and Business Services	10.9%	10.1%	11.7%
Retail Trade	8.5%	10.7%	9.1%
Education and Health Services	8.2%	15.5%	8.9%
Transportation and Utilities	7.5%	3.8%	6.9%
Self-Employed	6.1%	5.8%	2.2%
Construction	5.8%	5.3%	5.8%
Financial Activities	4.7%	6.4%	3.9%
Leisure and Hospitality	3.8%	8.4%	4.5%

⁵² Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Situation of Veterans – 2015

⁵³ Ibid

2.11 Economic Outcomes – Unemployment Rates

Across various Veteran sub-populations, annual unemployment rates trended downward from 2010 through 2015, reflecting the overall improvement in the national economy as well as increased commitment from employers to hiring Veterans (**Table 17**).⁵⁴

Table 17. Unemployment Rates Over Time⁵⁵

Cohort (18 Years and Over)	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
All Veterans	8.8%	8.3%	6.9%	6.5%	5.2%	4.2%
Post-9/11 Veterans	11.5%	12.1%	9.9%	9.0%	7.2%	5.8%
Pre-9/11 Veterans	7.7%	7.0%	5.9%	5.6%	4.2%	3.8%
WWII, Korean War, or Vietnam Veterans	8.3%	7.6%	6.4%	6.5%	5.0%	4.3%
Non-Veterans	9.4%	8.7%	7.9%	7.2%	6.0%	5.2%

⁵⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, LN Series IDs, Annual Averages

⁵⁵ Ibid

3. Public-Private Partnerships

This data informs VA's programs at the national level, framing a larger policy discussion of how best to support Veterans and ensure their economic competitiveness over the long term. One policy tool that provided highly effective results in this effort was public-private partnerships (P3s). It should be noted that during the VEI pilot, the responsibility of identifying and approving partnerships rested with VA personnel.

VA used a deliberate strategy of leveraging P3s to meet large-scale and complex challenges requiring cross-sector solutions and collaboration. Effective P3s combine multifaceted interests and resources with collaboration to achieve shared goals and objectives toward a mutually beneficial outcome. VA's authority to participate in P3s is rooted in, and limited by, federal statute. VA policies and procedures also ensure that partners are made aware of applicable legal and ethical rules.

VA policy requires that all P3s meet a basic suitability threshold. The primary reasons for pursuing a P3 included, but were not limited to:

- Advancing a shared objective of increasing economic opportunities.
- Enhancing impact through resource-sharing or gift agreements (no cost).
- Achieving mutual programmatic goals to increase economic mobility.

Over the past year, P3s were evaluated for suitability based on the mandate of VA's Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to promote the economic success of Veterans. This evaluation was informed by VA Directive 0008, which established departmental policy on how to develop and maintain responsible and productive P3s. The comprehensive due diligence process detailed in Directive 0008 includes questions of suitability, the potential for enhanced impact toward mutual goals, mechanisms for proper documentation, and ongoing analysis of partnership effectiveness. Adherence to the process allowed OEO to pursue innovative solutions to complex challenges with the assistance of a wide variety of Veteran-centric organizations across the partnership space.

Other considerations aligned with the strategic goals of VEI included:

- Do the services assist in closing a gap or advancing an issue that is key to Veteran economic opportunity or improved mobility?
- Is the partner offering to provide a service to Veterans at no cost? Partnerships that would require a Veteran to pay for something — through an earned benefit (such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill) or from their own resources — were not considered.
- Is the partner offering to provide a resource to VA at no cost? VA has authority to accept gifts under the condition that the individual or organization offering the gift does not have an expectation of compensation or privileged access to VA in return.
- Is this program available to all Veterans? To their families?
- Is the partner enduring, or does the entity have suitable scale?
- Did VA's Office of the General Counsel concur in the memorandum establishing the P3?

After these basic suitability and financial considerations were satisfactorily addressed, potential partnerships were further evaluated to determine consistency with VA strategic goals and individually tailored to accomplish the following objectives:

- Establish conduits for Veteran-centric training in high-demand industries.
- Expand the reach of VA outreach and advocacy programs — and those of our partners — through consideration of strategic initiatives of mutual importance.
- Assist TSMs and Veterans seeking to integrate into their local communities.

Through these partnerships, VA connected TSMs, Veterans, and their families with an array of valuable services and tools without additional cost to taxpayers. Leveraging gift agreements and partnerships generated about \$1 billion worth of available services for Veterans. P3s focused on outreach and engagement greatly enhanced VA's efforts to create awareness of activities to promote Veteran economic success. These P3s also allowed partner organizations to serve Veterans "at scale" by leveraging the vast national network and social media reach of the Department of Veterans Affairs. VEI efforts to "house" Economic Liaisons in partner office facilities required significant coordination with the legal representatives of VA and with local partners. While VEI execution of this particular community integration model was limited, the value proposition was plainly established, and a master template agreement was developed for future use by VA.

Exploring the potential value of P3s enhanced existing tools and resources while expanding the dialogue about opportunities for collaboration and innovation. Working with our P3 partners, we informed Veteran-centric service providers of our efforts to innovate and spurred interest in partnering with VA across the country. The resulting framework to develop open and transparent economic mobility solutions is an opportunity for VA and other stakeholders to develop, integrate, and improve services that can help meet the needs of the population we collectively serve.

Table 18 identifies some of VA's more notable recent partnerships.

Table 18. Notable Public-Private Partnerships

Partner Organization	Partner Description	Benefit to Veterans
Coursera	Global provider of massive open online courses	This partnership offers every Veteran, through the VEC™, one free Coursera Course Certificate. Courses accessed with these certificates aid individuals in competing for a better job, gaining valuable credentials, or building on their knowledge.
LinkedIn	Largest professional network on the internet	This partnership enhances VEC™ functionality by creating the ability to import a LinkedIn profile directly into the VEC™. It also makes LinkedIn's current offer of a one-year free Job Seeker subscription, a more than \$360 value, more visible and prominent.
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)	Nonprofit offering compassionate care to all those grieving the death of a loved who served in our armed forces since 1994	This partnership facilitates the transmission of information to TAPS regarding the Fry Scholarship and the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance program — two programs administered by VA to support those who have lost a loved one in the line of duty.
America's Warrior Partnership (AWP)	National nonprofit with a Veteran focus that has developed a model for communities to identify and assist TSMs and Veterans in their areas	AWP affiliates provide one-on-one support for TSMs, Veterans, and family members. This partnership, which placed Economic Liaisons in the affiliates' community facilities, connected more Veterans to VA services and allowed Economic Liaisons to have greater involvement with local Veteran economic opportunity efforts.
RP/6	A "one-stop shop" that provides access to resources and peer assistance for Servicemembers, Veterans, and military families	This partnership with the VECEI Economic Liaison in Seattle ensured that local Veterans were aware of VA benefits and services.
American Red Cross	Global voluntary relief organization	This partnership supports the Veterans Community Learning Hubs initiative by organizing facilitators to lead content-based classroom discussions.
The Mission Continues	Nonprofit empowering Veterans who are adjusting to life at home to find purpose through community impact	This partnership assists VECEI by enhancing community awareness of VA's Veteran economic impact efforts.
Bob Woodruff Foundation	Nonprofit dedicated to creating long-lasting positive outcomes for wounded, ill, and injured Veterans	This partnership brings together VA and Veteran-focused stakeholders to develop deeper and more innovative local and community relationships, particularly in regard to expanding VA's outreach efforts regarding VA benefits and Veteran-specific community resources.

4. Veterans Economic Communities Initiative Overview

“Through the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative, we have a great opportunity to help Veterans strengthen businesses and communities as employees, as entrepreneurs, as students, and as friends, neighbors, and community leaders.”

*— VA Secretary McDonald,
May 18, 2015*

VECI’s goal was to contribute to a culture of collaboration that bolstered trust, transparency, productivity, and accountability. In the year since VECI was officially launched in Dallas, Texas, VA placed Economic Liaisons in 25 communities across the country to develop, support, and implement place-based solutions to improve the economic success of local Veterans and their families. These dedicated boots on the ground engaged with Veterans and their families, local government and nonprofit organizations, employers, and educational institutions to advance Secretary Robert A. McDonald’s charge to create a high quality experience for our nation’s Veterans. This access to resources and support empowers Veterans and their families as they become students, homeowners, entrepreneurs, employees, and community leaders — boosting each community’s economy and enriching its vitality.

Throughout the pilot, VECI Economic Liaisons helped coordinate existing local Veteran support networks through focused roundtables, formal VA partnerships, and training and education sessions. Economic Liaisons connected Veterans to VA programs, services, and offerings such as Vets.gov, the GI Bill®, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, VetSuccess on Campus, and the Integrated Disability Evaluation System, in addition to federal agencies that support Veteran economic mobility.

4.1 Mission and Objective

The mission and objective of VECI strongly aligned with Secretary McDonald’s MyVA transformation program, which is designed to establish a new paradigm of service for our nation’s Veterans. MyVA focuses on making interactions with VA predictable, consistent, and easy, providing high-quality service, increased customer satisfaction, and greater trust overall. Integral to MyVA are strategic partnerships that can leverage and extend VA resources and, importantly, bring fresh perspectives and innovation.

VECI was developed under VA’s authority to create P3s focused on outreach and engagement in support of VA programs.⁵⁶ Specifically, VECI aimed to support the economic success of Veterans and their families by bringing together community partners to coordinate and integrate services at the local level. During the pilot, VA placed an Economic Liaison in each community to serve as a forward point of contact and collaborate with government leaders, businesses, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations. Economic Liaisons helped to form or strengthen networks of support and resources for Veterans and their families. In so doing, they were a direct complement to, and extension of, the Transition Assistance Program, which supports TSMs as they leave the military and reintegrate into civilian life.

VA’s 2015 *Veteran Economic Opportunity Report* made clear “the interrelated nature of Veteran economic competitiveness issues and the vital need to collaborate with interagency stakeholders to monitor and improve program delivery.” Implicit in this statement was the recognition that national trends and generalized conclusions masked important variation and nuance across the country. The challenges of Veterans and their families in Atlanta were not the same as those facing Veterans in San Diego. Each of the 25 VECI communities is different: The makeup of their Veteran populations is not the same, their employment bases and prospects vary, and local workforce skill levels and training opportunities diverge.

⁵⁶ Specifically, Title 38, U.S. Code Section 6306 – Outreach Activities, Use of Other Agencies, authorizes the VA Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Labor, to seek to promote the development and establishment of employment opportunities, training opportunities, and other opportunities for Veterans. Further, Title 38, Section 523 – Coordination and Promotion of Other Program Affecting Veterans and Their Dependents, authorizes the Secretary to achieve (1) maximum coordination and interrelationship of services among all programs and activities affecting Veterans and their dependents and (2) the effective coordination of benefits and services with appropriate programs, and information about such programs, conducted by state and local government agencies and by private entities at the state and local level.

This variation of local conditions argued for testing specific place-based strategies that thoughtfully integrated national programs with both the needs and the constraints of each community, as well as with the current set of local government and nongovernment programs. Such seamless integration is best achieved by having a dedicated, fully engaged community resource to support coordination, engagement, and communication efforts. Economic Liaisons served as information, outreach, and engagement catalysts focused on furthering Veteran economic competitiveness during the 12-month VECl pilot. MyVA is now that community resource going forward.

4.2 Selection Criteria

The VECl site selection model used a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to identify the optimal deployment strategy of the VECl program pilot. The VECl site selection model leveraged publicly available data to examine and compare several key variables and metrics across MSAs. The key variables and metrics identified for each MSA are displayed in **Table 19**.

Table 19. Key Variables and Metrics Assessed in the VECl Site Selection Model

Veteran Population	Employment	Education
MSAs with largest Post-9/11 Veteran populations (ages 17–44)	High rates of Veteran unemployment within the MSA	Highest spend by VA on Veteran education within the MSA
MSAs with the largest annual TSM populations	High rates of job growth within the MSA	Highest average spend by VA per Veteran on education (GI Bill®)/Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E)

The data points were analyzed to score and rank 362 MSAs in order to identify the top 25 based on each of the key variables. Weightings were then used across key selected metrics for seven distinct scenarios, with each scenario using a different weighting. From a list of nearly 100 high-scoring MSAs, additional factors were assessed to select the first 25 VECl communities. These factors include the number of key variable categories the MSA appeared in, its rank within each key variable category, opportunities within the MSA to increase strategic partnerships, and the number of DOL American Job Center locations. These and other factors ensured broad geographic representation and other elements of diversity important to testing the VECl concept in its pilot phase.

4.3 Strategies

Economic Liaisons supporting the VECE pilot focused on implementing the specific strategies described below in order to achieve meaningful outcomes for Veterans and their family members. These activities were tracked monthly as key program metrics for assessing the value of the pilot and the return on investment for VA.

4.3.1 Outreach and Engagement

Outreach and engagement to promote improved economic outcomes were the core activity of VECE — connecting, supporting, extending, and strengthening local efforts to support local Veterans, consistent with VA's national programs. VECE Economic Liaisons interacted within the community to develop an interlocking, layered network of capabilities and resources that increase Veteran opportunities at the local level. Specifically, Economic Liaisons:

- Raised awareness of the benefits of investing in Veterans.
- Brought the value of national VA partnerships to the local level.
- Used VA's public videos and information to promote dialogue focused on efforts to overcome education and career challenges that Veterans and their families face in their community.
- Made connections among diverse community organizations that serve Veterans and their families to maximize their impact.

In addition to taking advantage of existing opportunities to engage with local stakeholders, Economic Liaisons coordinated VA-specific events to highlight VA programs and better connect local audiences with them. These events included:

- Policy Academy: A large-scale (more than 400 participants), multiday meeting hosted by VA in Orange County, California, in September 2015. It that brought together a diverse range of sponsors and supporters from nonprofit organizations, state and federal governments, and academia to discuss meaningful solutions to the barriers faced by Veterans and TSMs in achieving successful economic outcomes.
- Veterans Economic Impact Summits: Medium- to large-scale events (more than 100 participants) in which senior VA leaders met with VECE partners, including government leaders and stakeholders, to encourage public commitments to hire Veterans, register employers on the VEC™, and inform stakeholders about Vets.gov.
- Veterans Economic Impact Roundtables: Smaller gatherings (20 to 30 participants) of public and private sector leaders and subject matter experts focused on a single initiative or ongoing effort with the goal of gathering facilitated input from all participants in a short time frame.

While the core activity of VECE is outreach and engagement, this is really the means to the larger end of improving the long-term economic success of Veterans and their families in each VECE community. The other core strategies directly address ways of assisting Veterans in this regard.

4.3.2 Veterans Employment Center™ Adoption

Employment is a key aspect of long-term economic security. Indeed, the original interagency Veterans Opportunity to Work/Veterans Employment Initiative Task Force established a mandate for VA to communicate the value of Veterans as civilian employees and to encourage companies to purposefully identify and recruit from this rich talent pool. This led to a joint implementation program to create the VEC™ and manage its adoption in 2011. Thus, a critical strategy for VECE was to bring together the supply of Veterans in each community to meet the demand of employers, resulting in higher employment rates and income for that community.

Vets.gov now houses the VEC™, the federal government's single authoritative online source for connecting TSMs, Veterans, and their families to meaningful career opportunities. The VEC™ is the first government-wide product that brings together a reputable cadre of public and private employers

More than **19,500** employers had registered on the VEC™, with more than **1.2 million** positions committed to hire Veterans. Approximately **743,000** Veterans have been hired since the VEC™ launched.

with real job opportunities and provides TSMs, Veterans, and their families with the tools to translate their military skills into civilian job capabilities. As a resource for connecting Veterans and employers, the VEC™ has established a marketplace of trust and transparency for making Veteran hiring commitments.

In presentations to employers throughout the VECl pilot, Economic Liaisons raised awareness about the VEC™ and promoted its value across their VECl communities. Economic Liaisons helped employers to understand and embrace the value of the VEC™ by visiting with business leaders, executives, and their human resource experts to explain and demonstrate the features, functionality, and utility of this dynamic resource. Economic Liaisons also encouraged employers to register on the VEC™ and use it to find Veteran talent to meet their workforce needs. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Economic Liaisons enlisted employers to make specific public commitments to hire Veterans; these commitments are recorded and displayed on the VEC™ site. Making a public commitment is a great way for employers to broadly communicate that they support and value the experience of the military community.

4.3.3 Upskilling and Education

In today's fast-paced, ever-changing economy, education and training are key to maintaining economic relevance and enabling economic mobility. Providing Veterans with the opportunity to acquire or sharpen their skills, education, and training is a critical function that enables Veterans to bridge or translate their military experience into challenging work and a rewarding career.

Many Veterans are taking advantage of powerful resources, such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. These benefits are a gateway to greater economic success, enabling Veterans to complete training and education programs that may increase their employability or open doors to entirely new career fields. The VECl pilot provided VA with a new opportunity to collaborate with local educational institutions, Veteran-focused service providers, and other stakeholders to promote the use of GI Bill benefits through several key initiatives:

- Implementation of Veterans Community Learning Hubs.
- Helping education providers commit to implementing the 8 Keys to Veterans' Success initiative.
- Increasing employer awareness of, and interest in, the creation of registered apprenticeships and on-the-job training programs.

Learning Hubs

Veterans Community Learning Hubs used a blend of online and classroom learning to enable TSMs, Veterans, and their spouses to quickly and conveniently build professional skills and increase their career opportunities. In partnership with Coursera, the American Red Cross, The Mission Continues, and other local partners, Veterans Community Learning Hubs offered no-cost learning opportunities in topics that meet the needs of TSMs and Veterans in each community, including business writing, entrepreneurship, communication, and Microsoft Office software.

Veterans Community Learning Hubs combined the breadth and depth of online academic programs (such as those offered by Coursera) with the experience of in-person facilitators from the Red Cross and other partners. These facilitators guided students through the curriculum and provided supplemental materials to enrich course content. Each week, online modules were completed outside the classroom, while in-class sessions allowed learners to discuss course material with peers, hear from local subject matter experts, and network with one another.

8 Keys to Veterans' Success

Over the next several years, a growing number of Veterans will be enrolling in America's colleges and universities as they seek to become career-ready and improve their employment prospects. For these Veterans, obtaining a degree, certificate, or license is a key milestone on the path to career success. Executive Order 13607, *Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members*, calls for federal agencies to work together to ensure that educational institutions effectively serve those who have served our nation. These interagency efforts are designed to enable Veterans to more easily obtain information about college access, identify programs that meet their individual needs, and choose among quality institutions and available financial aid options under the GI Bill and federal student aid.

The 8 Keys to Veterans' Success is a White House initiative involving the departments of Education, Veterans Affairs, Defense, and Labor. It consists of steps that postsecondary institutions can take to assist Veterans and TSMs entering higher education, completing their college programs, and obtaining career-ready skills. By affirming support for the 8 Keys, postsecondary institutions express their commitment to create a welcoming academic environment for TSMs and Veterans and to tailor programs to their distinct needs.

Economic Liaisons reached out to community colleges and universities within their VECI communities that did not provide a full range of resources to Veterans. VECI encouraged those education providers to register and commit to the 8 Keys to Veterans' Success, with the goal of ensuring that the overwhelming majority of colleges and universities in each community are signatories to the 8 Keys program. This will ensure that Veterans have an abundance of choices for meeting their education and training needs.

Registered Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships can provide a structured, proven path for obtaining valuable skills that serve as a foundation for a successful career. Such apprenticeships combine on-the-job training with related technical instruction, normally for a period of one to five years. With a shortage of skilled workers in many industries, the registered apprenticeship program, administered by DOL, represents an excellent opportunity for Veterans to convert their military skills and experience into a rewarding civilian career with measurable economic incentives. Apprenticeships also offer TSMs and Veterans the opportunity to enter an entirely new, in-demand trade. Yet apprenticeships are not widely known or used in the United States.

Economic Liaisons encouraged employers and organizations that provide skills-based training programs to offer registered apprenticeship opportunities. Specifically, Economic Liaisons worked with employers and other organizations to understand current and projected critical skill shortages in their local communities. They then used this knowledge, in conjunction with VA data on the skills and abilities of Veterans and TSMs, to identify areas where apprenticeships might help to meet the community's workforce needs. Economic Liaisons referred employers that were interested in registered apprenticeships to appropriate contacts at DOL and at each State Approving Agency that certifies a registered apprenticeship for GI Bill use.

5. Community Snapshots by VEI Location

While the strategies described in this report were common across all VEI communities, their expression in each community differed based on the specific needs and opportunities associated with that community, as described in the 25 VEI community addenda. The table below outlines each available community snapshot and related data summary.

Table 20. Community Snapshots and Data Sheets by VEI Location

Atlanta, Georgia Community Snapshot	Atlanta, Georgia Data Sheet
Chicago, Illinois Community Snapshot	Chicago, Illinois Data Sheet
Cincinnati, Ohio Community Snapshot	Cincinnati, Ohio Data Sheet
Colorado Springs, Colorado Community Snapshot	Colorado Springs, Colorado Data Sheet
Dallas, Texas Community Snapshot	Dallas, Texas Data Sheet
El Paso, Texas Community Snapshot	El Paso, Texas Data Sheet
Honolulu, Hawaii Community Snapshot	Honolulu, Hawaii Data Sheet
Houston, Texas Community Snapshot	Houston, Texas Data Sheet
Jacksonville, Florida Community Snapshot	Jacksonville, Florida Data Sheet
Kansas City, Missouri Community Snapshot	Kansas City, Missouri Data Sheet
Las Vegas, Nevada Community Snapshot	Las Vegas, Nevada Data Sheet
Los Angeles, California Community Snapshot	Los Angeles, California Data Sheet
Louisville, Kentucky Community Snapshot	Louisville, Kentucky Data Sheet
Miami, Florida Community Snapshot	Miami, Florida Data Sheet
Nashville, Tennessee Community Snapshot	Nashville, Tennessee Data Sheet
New York, New York Community Snapshot	New York, New York Data Sheet
Norfolk, Virginia Community Snapshot	Norfolk, Virginia Data Sheet
Phoenix, Arizona Community Snapshot	Phoenix, Arizona Data Sheet
Richmond, Virginia Community Snapshot	Richmond, Virginia Data Sheet
Riverside, California Community Snapshot	Riverside, California Data Sheet
San Antonio, Texas Community Snapshot	San Antonio, Texas Data Sheet
San Diego, California Community Snapshot	San Diego, California Data Sheet
Seattle, Washington Community Snapshot	Seattle, Washington Data Sheet
St. Louis, Missouri Community Snapshot	St. Louis, Missouri Data Sheet
Washington, D.C. Community Snapshot	Washington, D.C. Data Sheet

Communities are listed in alphabetical order, ranking is not implied.

6. Summary

In the past year, VA piloted VEI to test how it can better connect with local champions, programs, and resources to develop, support, and implement place-based solutions that increase the economic success of local Veterans and their families. By July 2016, VEI had:

- Engaged thousands of Veterans and interested stakeholders in their communities to understand their needs and concerns and explain key VA programs and benefits.
- Informed employers about the resources on Vets.gov, including the VEC™, and secured a commitment from many of them to hire Veterans.
- Presented the value of registered apprenticeship programs and referred employers to key resources to start such programs in their companies.
- Developed and launched Veterans Community Learning Hubs to help Veterans and their families increase their skills and knowledge through no-cost online courses.
- Assisted local educational institutions in ensuring that their programs were aligned with the needs and desires of Veterans.
- Shared best practices across the network of VEI communities.

These activities strengthened the network of support for Veterans and their families in each VEI community, aligned local efforts with national VA programs, and provided VA with critical insights into local best practices and circumstances. Consistent with the ongoing MyVA transformation initiative, VEI put the Veteran first, focusing on making a meaningful impact on the lives of Veterans and their families in each community.

Through the VEI Policy Academy held in September 2015 and ongoing dialogue with local partners, VA learned several important lessons, including:

- The importance of having deep knowledge of local conditions to inform the implementation of national programs.
- The value of public-private partnerships as a way to provide additional and innovative resources to support the economic success of Veterans and their families.

6.1 Looking to the Future

As VA continues its transformation with an even greater focus on the Veteran experience, we are taking positive steps to leverage the best practices of the VEI pilot and improve the long-term economic success of Veterans and their families.

Going forward, VA is partnering with DOL to incorporate what we learned about stakeholder engagement and collective impact into existing community-based efforts. Efforts such as Community Veterans Engagement Boards; our interagency collaboration with DOL, DoD, the Small Business Administration, and other agencies; and our joint efforts within VA to tighten collaboration between VA Regional Offices and VA Medical Centers will all be strengthened as a result of VEI.

To help organizations take advantage of the lessons learned as a result of the VEI pilot, VA will also release a Best Practices Toolkit that will include practical tools to help communities jump-start their Veteran economic opportunity efforts. We believe this toolkit will benefit any employer, nonprofit organization, educational institution, or other community partner seeking to add value to the broader network of Veteran stakeholders.

7. Appendix: Data Sources and Additional Data

7.1 Differences in Data Sources

This report and its appendices use a variety of public data sources to provide accurate and current demographic and economic characteristics of Veterans. Each VEI pilot community section includes a data summary derived from the data sources used to develop the national landscape section. As an additional resource, the MSA Data Summary that informed the Economic Liaisons' month-to-month operations are found in the appendices. Due to differences in data sources and methods, there are differences in some of the data between the report and the MSA Data Summaries. Below is an explanation of the data sources used in the report and the MSA Data Summaries and the reasons why each was chosen.

This report focuses on providing the most accurate information on Veterans. For this reason, the number of data sources in the report was kept to a minimum. Public data sources that include demographics on Veterans do not always break out the difference between the Veteran and non-Veteran populations. Some of the data available in these sources are available for the population as a whole but not for just Veterans. The five-year ACS, published by the Census Bureau, has a very large population (about 3 percent of the over 300 million people living in the United States) and contains most of the demographic data used in this report⁵⁷, with two exceptions: the overall MSA unemployment rates and the Post-9/11 GI Bill usage characteristics.

Regarding unemployment rates, annual averages from the LAUS are presented in the report to provide the most current information. LAUS data are not available for Veterans at the MSA level. As a result, Veteran unemployment rates from the one-year ACS estimates for 2010 to 2014 are provided in this report. All data regarding Post-9/11 GI Bill statistics come from VA's Chapter 33 LTS database and public VA resources.

The MSA Data Summaries were created for the start of the VEI pilot program in May 2015 to provide a comprehensive overview of demographic and economic activities at the county, MSA, and state levels. The MSA Data Summaries for each MSA were updated monthly to inform the activities of the Economic Liaisons. The May 2016 MSA Data Summaries can be found in the addendums to this report. In the MSA Data Summaries, statistics on gender, age, and period of service were taken from the Veteran Population Projection Model 2014 (VetPop2014). Unlike survey data, a model uses specific business rules to provide future estimates. The VetPop2014 Model is able to provide data for Fiscal Year 2015 that is much more current than the 2010–2014 five-year ACS estimates. Veteran unemployment rates in the MSA Data Summaries were provided by the 2010–2014 five-year ACS estimates because other more current data sources do not have Veteran-specific employment data. To provide the most current view of unemployment rates, a heat map for the counties around the MSA was updated monthly with information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The data in this report and the MSA Data Summaries in the appendices are meant to provide background information on Veterans in each MSA. Veterans comprise a relatively small percent of the population over the age of 18 in the United States (about 9 percent).⁵⁸ Many data sources are needed to provide both accurate and current data for such a small population. Each data source has its own method of survey collection or modeling and covers a different period of time — resulting in different estimates. Great care was taken when choosing the data sources for each document, and if conflicts arise between sources, none should be viewed as incorrect. For additional information, the links for all of the public data sources in each document are provided on the following page.

⁵⁷ 2010–2014 ACS five-year estimates

⁵⁸ Ibid

This report:

- [American Community Survey](#)
- [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#)
- [GI Bill Comparison Tool](#)
- [8 Keys to Veterans' Success Sites](#)

MSA Data Summary:

- [Veteran Population Projection Model 2014](#)
- [American Community Survey](#)
- [Local Area Unemployment Statistics Map](#)
- [Veteran Compensation and Pension](#)
- [Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures](#)
- [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)
- [County Business Patterns](#)
- [Department of Housing and Urban Development Point-in-Time estimates](#)

7.2 Numeric Counts

Table 21. Numeric Counts for Figure 1: Family Status – 2014 DoD Demographics⁵⁹

Family Status	Military Personnel
Single, No Children	906,992
Married, With Children	767,761
Married, No Children	337,622
Single, With Children	138,276

Table 22. Numeric Counts for Figure 2: Child Dependent Ages – 2014 DoD Demographics⁶⁰

Ages	Dependent Population
< 5 Years	680,552
6 to 11 Years	565,834
12 to 18 Years	443,964
19 to 22 Years	129,309

⁵⁹ Military OneSource Demographic Reports, 2010–2014

⁶⁰ Ibid

Table 23. Numeric Counts for Figure 5: Post-9/11 Veteran Population by Age⁶¹

Age	Post-9/11 Veteran Population
18 to 34 Years	1,933,000
35 to 54 Years	1,394,000
55 to 64 Years	210,000
65 Years and Older	58,000

Table 24. Numeric Counts for Figure 6: Training Type⁶²

Training Type	Students
Junior College	203,266
Flight	803
Correspondence	262
On-the-Job Training	5,399
Apprenticeship	5,367
Undergraduate	403,346
Graduate	102,116
Non-College Degree	76,203

Table 25. Numeric Counts for Figure 7: Types⁶³

Institution Type	Count
University or College, Four-Year	6,142
College, Two-Year	2,391
Non-College Degree	9,580
Teachers College	47
Accredited Hospital	741
Job Training Establishment (APP/ OJT)	20,290

⁶¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey, 2015 Annual Averages

⁶² Chapter 33 LTS, Fiscal Year 2015

⁶³ Ibid

Table 26. Unemployment Levels for Table 17: Unemployment Rates Over Time⁶⁴

Cohort (18 Years and Over)	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
All Veterans	1,020,000	945,000	773,000	722,000	573,000	495,000
Post-9/11 Veterans	205,000	234,000	205,000	205,000	182,000	168,000
Pre-9/11 Veterans	194,000	172,000	150,000	152,000	117,000	105,000
WWII/Korean/ Vietnam Veterans	331,000	269,000	201,000	191,000	132,000	102,000
Non-Veterans	13,222,000	12,284,000	11,200,000	10,202,000	8,618,000	7,439,000

⁶⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, LN Series IDs, Annual Averages