

The logo for the Education Development Center (EDC), consisting of the letters 'EDC' in white on a blue square background.

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WOMEN VETERANS IN STEM: RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE PIPELINE FROM SERVICE TO STEM

For Policymakers, Government Agencies, and
Department of Defence

JULY 2021

Executive Summary

While many programs and support services exist for veterans, very few are tailored to women veterans, and there is no system in place to unify these resources in a cohesive and effective way. As a result, the needs of women veterans are often overlooked.

In March 2021, Education Development Center (EDC) led a virtual convening on recruiting and retaining women veterans in the STEM workforce, particularly those from populations currently underrepresented in STEM. The event capped an 18-month effort to map the current landscape of women veterans' support services. In addition, the event provided an opportunity to identify strategies to strengthen existing services and develop new programs to effectively engage, train, and retain women veterans in the STEM workforce.

Women veterans in STEM jobs earn 54% more than peers in non-STEM jobs and 13% more than non-veteran women in STEM (Maury et al., 2018). Further, many women veterans have the expertise and skills to enter and succeed in the STEM workforce.

Our [full recommendations report](#) offers actionable recommendations that employers, policymakers, federal agencies, higher education institutions, and professional organizations can take to strengthen the pipeline from service to STEM for women veterans. **Convening participants felt strongly that our country needs a national resource clearinghouse and technical assistance center to serve women veterans.** They envisioned that the center would fill the following gaps:

- » Consolidate information about services and resources available to women service members and veterans and provide advisory services for these women.
- » Provide technical assistance to STEM industry employers and institutions of higher education on how they can better recruit and retain women veterans.

VISION FOR THE NATIONAL CENTER



- ✓ **Provide separate portals for four specific audiences:** women service members and veterans, employers, higher education institutions, and support organizations and professional associations.
- ✓ **Provide resources and guidance for women service members and veterans** to understand the opportunities and pathways in STEM, and support them in their pursuit of STEM careers.
- ✓ **Provide tailored, customized technical assistance to employers and higher education institutions** on how to better recruit and retain women veterans.
- ✓ **Offer guidance to employers and higher education institutions** on how to establish communities of practice; smaller organizations typically don't have the internal capacity to create and sustain their own robust group.
- ✓ **Mandate a third party to serve as a resource and sounding board** for efforts that support women veterans' employment to improve the quality of programs and support provided.

This paper offers recommendations for actions that policymakers and government agencies can take to strengthen the pipeline from service to STEM for women veterans. In addition, we spotlight promising programs and successful strategies to help inspire and inform action.

Policymakers and Government Agencies

The majority of legislation and government-funded programs targeting veterans are not tailored to women veterans. To ensure that women veterans have equal access to services and supports, programs need to be specifically designed to be more inclusive of these service members.

WE RECOMMEND POLICYMAKERS AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES DO THE FOLLOWING

- ✓ Incentivize equitable hiring practices among those seeking government contracts by adding hiring benchmarks for women veterans.
- ✓ Add an “equity” criterion to the [HIRE Vets Medallion Award Criteria](#) to promote hiring and employment that focuses on women veterans.
- ✓ Expand the Work Opportunity Tax Credit criteria for “Qualified Veteran” to include women veterans as one of the targeted groups.
- ✓ Launch coordinated social media campaigns across agencies that promote programs, services, and resources to help women veteran small-business owners.
- ✓ Develop new resources and programs to help women veterans who own small businesses navigate the challenges of obtaining [Veteran-Owned Small Business Certification](#).
- ✓ Set goals within federal, state, and municipal agencies for a percentage or number of contracts to be granted to women veteran-owned businesses to mirror what these agencies do with veterans and service-disabled veterans.
- ✓ Work with state workforce development boards to define preferential hiring language and benefits for companies and municipalities that hire women veterans and contract with women veteran-owned small businesses.

Promising Programs



- Many states have technical assistance centers and support staff to help veteran small businesses register with their state.
- The Small Business Administration helps businesses register for [federal government contracts](#).
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ [Women Veteran-Owned Small Business Initiative](#) was created to “equip, empower and educate Women Veteran entrepreneurs for success and economic opportunities”.¹

¹ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization. (n.d.). *What is the Women Veteran-Owned Small Business Initiative?* <https://www.va.gov/OSDBU/wvosbi.asp>

Department of Defense

A more positive and inclusive service experience may help women veterans have an easier transition to the civilian world.

WE RECOMMEND THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE DO THE FOLLOWING

- ✓ Build and improve upon military-wide equity and inclusion training.
- ✓ Ensure that transition planning starts long before departure and continues beyond service.
- ✓ Ensure that all service members, independent of their leadership, role, or post, receive the same level of transition support, including post-military career planning (pre-transition), support during the transition, and post-transition resources.
- ✓ Create a transition services office that serves all branches in order to share existing resources and create a consistent transition plan for service members.
- ✓ Encourage veterans to look for companies and organizations that have committed to hiring and retaining veterans.
- ✓ Hire an independent external agency to conduct an assessment of the [Transition Assistance Program](#), with a particular focus on the unique experiences, needs, and challenges of women veterans; how the program has worked and not worked for them; and what improvements they suggest. Translate the assessment findings into actions.



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