



**SOLAR  
READY VETS®  
NETWORK**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

# Strategies for Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Military Talent

JUNE 2024



## A Guide for Solar Industry Employers

**This resource was prepared by the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA) and the Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC).**

### **About the Solar Ready Vets Network**

The Solar Ready Vets (SRV) Network™ is a collection of initiatives funded by the U.S. Department of Energy to strengthen solar career pathways for transitioning service members and veterans and support the industry's efforts to invest in military talent. Led by the Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC), this work is carried out nationwide in partnership with leading industry, training, and veterans service organizations including the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), Hiring Our Heroes (HOH), Solar Energy International (SEI), and the Midwest Renewable Energy Association (MREA).

The Solar Ready Vets Network connects military veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses with solar career pathways through a variety of programs and partnerships. Key initiatives include:

- Corporate and Skills-Based Fellowships
- Career Navigation Resources and Mentorship
- National Guideline Standards of Apprenticeship
- SkillBridge Pathways to Solar Careers
- Employer Resources and Recruitment Partnerships



Learn more and join the SRV Network at [SolarReadyVeterans.org](https://SolarReadyVeterans.org).

### **About IREC**

The Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC) builds the foundation for rapid adoption of clean energy and energy efficiency to benefit people, the economy, and our planet. Its vision is a 100% clean energy future that is reliable, resilient, and equitable. IREC develops and advances the regulatory reforms, technical standards, and workforce and community-based solutions needed to enable the streamlined integration of clean, distributed energy resources. IREC has been trusted for its independent clean energy expertise for over 40 years, since its founding in 1982. For more information, visit [irecusa.org](https://irecusa.org) or follow IREC on [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), or [Instagram](#).

### **About SEIA**

Founded in 1974, the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA) is the national trade association for the solar and solar + storage industries, building a comprehensive vision for the Solar+ Decade through research, education, and advocacy. SEIA works with 1,200 member companies and other strategic partners to fight for policies that create jobs in every community and shape fair market rules that promote competition and the growth of reliable, low-cost solar power.

Along with SEIA members and coalitions of allies, SEIA advocates on behalf of the solar industry and a transition to an equitable clean energy economy at the federal, state, and local levels.



*Acknowledgment:* This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) under Solar Energy Technologies Office (SETO) Agreement Number DE-EE00010493.

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## Executive Summary

Rapid industry expansion has increased the demand for highly trained and diverse solar workers over the past decade. As the solar industry continues to be a leading source of job growth in the U.S. energy sector, building a diverse and qualified workforce to keep pace with accelerating demand is a priority for solar employers nationwide.

The diverse aptitudes and experiences that veterans gain through military service are highly transferable and in demand across the solar workforce. Military veterans are exceptional candidates for a wide range of solar energy careers, offering critical soft skills such as dynamic leadership, adaptability, teamwork, critical thinking, technical specialization, and a mission-completion work ethic, all of which are essential to the quickly expanding solar industry workforce.

The solar industry offers a collaborative and purpose-driven environment that resonates with service members and veterans looking to rise to their next challenge. According to *IREC's National Solar Jobs Census*, veterans comprise about 8% of the solar workforce (compared to 5% of the overall U.S. economy). However, to fully tap into and invest in this exceptional talent, the solar industry must intentionally cultivate a culture, along with policies and processes, to demonstrate that it values the unique assets military talent offers.

This guide is intended to support solar employers with resources, strategies, and best practices to recruit, hire, and retain veteran talent across all levels and sectors of the solar workforce. Beginning with the value proposition for investing in military talent, the toolkit also explores the process of attracting and hiring veterans, best practices for successful onboarding, and retention strategies.

The strategies presented here were compiled from several resources and publications related to recruiting, hiring, and retaining military-connected individuals. The Additional Resources section at the end provides a list of reports, toolkits, guides, programs, and webpages that employers may find useful in designing their military hiring strategies.

We use many terms to differentiate the groups that make up military connected individuals in this guide including service members, veterans, reservists, military spouses, and military caregivers, each of which bring their own uniquely valuable experiences and perspectives to the solar workforce.

# Why Veterans?

## The Business Case for Hiring Military Talent

Military veterans make excellent civilian workforce employees at all levels, from entry-level to senior leadership roles. They often have a strong commitment to the organization's mission, are highly organized, process-oriented, and have the ability to build effective teams. Most veterans also have cross-cultural experience, take initiative, and have a strong sense of accountability.



**Entrepreneurial mindset**



**Dynamic leadership**



**Organizational commitment**



**Valuable transferable skills**



**High levels of trust**



**Adaptable and versatile**

As described in the report, *Revisiting the Business Case for Hiring a Veteran*, published by Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families, there are several skills, abilities, and attributes that businesses need and military-connected talent possess. For example, veterans offer:

- Self-directed work ethic and discipline – Military-connected talent are often entrepreneurial, driven by achievement, and can adapt well to a fast-paced environment.
- Trust-related skills, professionalism, and hierarchical leadership – Military-connected talent often assume high levels of trust and display strong organizational commitment.
- Transferable skills, adaptability, and problem-solving – Military-connected talent are often able to apply skills gained through service across a variety of contexts, and environments.
- Teamwork skills – Military-connected talent have exceptional team-building skills and experience in diverse work settings. They also tend to work well within a collaborative team structure and can navigate different perspectives.
- Experience with complex systems – Military-connected talent often have and can leverage advanced technical training, and can implement processes for managing complex systems.
- Perseverance and fortitude – Military-connected talent are often resilient and can bounce back from setbacks.

In addition, because veterans are one of the groups covered by the **Work Opportunity Tax Credit**, businesses (as well as some tax-exempt organizations) may qualify for a significant federal tax exemption for hiring a qualified veteran during their first year of employment. This credit typically ranges from \$2,400 to \$9,600 depending on the veteran's service-connected disability status and unemployment history, hours worked (at least 400+ during the first year), and qualified wages.



# The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice Case

Hiring military-connected talent can contribute to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) goals and can exhibit your organization's commitment to social responsibility. Data from the SHRM Foundation report, *Mission Ready: Strategies and Best Practices for Recruiting, Retaining and Advancing Military-Connected Talent*, shows military-connected individuals are diverse in a multitude of ways in addition to their individual experiences, such as:

- Racial and ethnic diversity – Over 30% of veterans serving after 1975 are racial or ethnic minorities.
- Persons with disabilities – There are varying percentages of veterans who are thought to have service-connected disabilities, with around 43% of post-9/11 veterans and 27% of Gulf War veterans thought to have a service-connected disability.
- Intersectional identities – Female veterans are a highly diverse group, with around 25% of post-9/11 female veterans being Black, and 12% being Hispanic.
- Age and experience – There is a larger diversity in age in recent generations, as shown by the figure that 75% of post-9/11 female veterans are under 50 years old.

Another diverse and untapped population within the military-connected community is military spouses, 63% of whom report being underemployed, according to *The 2023 Comprehensive Report by Blue Star Families*. Active-duty military members typically relocate about every three years, leading military spouses to face unique employment challenges. Blue Star Families **also reports** that about 92% of military spouses are women and 80% are 40 years old or younger. About 45% of military spouses hold bachelor's or advanced degrees; however, military spouse unemployment rates are typically four to six times the national average unemployment rate.

From entry-level to senior leadership roles, military veterans and spouses are an exceptional and diverse source of talent. The following sections describe best practices and strategies for recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and retention.



# Recruiting and Hiring Veterans and Military-Connected Talent

Creating a successful and sustainable military hiring program takes time and planning. There are several resources available and steps employers can take to recruit and hire veterans and military-connected talent.

Executive leadership support is key—including identifying at least one “sponsor” of veteran initiatives. Buy-in should happen at every level, but having support from leadership ensures a top-down approach. Ensuring that key executives, the HR team, and hiring managers understand the importance of recruiting and hiring veterans—and the basics of how to do so—is another key component. The SHRM report, *Mission Ready: Strategies and Best Practices for Recruiting, Retaining and Advancing Military-Connected Talent* recommends some key strategies for recruiting military-connected talent:



- Create hiring opportunities for military-connected individuals. Connect with military talent via in-person and virtual hiring fairs and career events with partners such as Hiring Our Heroes.
- Use social media to market specifically to military-connected individuals.
- Promote available opportunities to colleges and military-connected organizations using their newsletters or job boards.
- Describe opportunities for service members, veterans, military spouses, or other subgroups in a defined way.
- Institute cohorts when hiring and onboarding job applicants in similar fields.

## Military Spouse Recruitment



Military spouses look for job postings that reveal sensitivity to their unique challenges. The *Military Spouse Employment Partnership* offers recommendations, such as creating virtual and flexible work opportunities when possible. Paid internship or externship positions to help spouses gain work experience, and listing military spouse–friendly resources at your company within the job description itself, such as mentoring programs and employee resource groups specifically devoted to spouses.

## Interviewing Military-Connected Talent

The SHRM report, *Mission Ready: Strategies and Best Practices for Recruiting, Retaining and Advancing Military-Connected Talent* describes strategies for conducting effective behavioral and situational interviews with veterans, who often are used to concise and polite interview styles, but are not accustomed to emphasizing their accomplishments, scope of authority, or level of responsibility. SHRM outlines the following best practices:

- Consider thanking an applicant for their service if their interview warrants it, but understand that some interviewees may not want to emphasize their military identity during an interview. Do not ask about their discharge status, details of combat experiences, specific disabilities, or the possibility of upcoming deployments. Focus on how their military experiences align with the job and the ability to perform job duties with reasonable accommodations or training. Uncover applicant strengths by asking them to share their stories. Focus on actively listening for skill sets and correlate them with job functions within the organization.
- Involve military-connected employees at your company by identifying roles that could be a good fit for veterans or providing veteran resume reviewing and interviewing assistance.
- Use competency-based job announcements and descriptions, recruiting, and selection processes—looking beyond role-specific skills at more generalizable competencies, behavioral qualities, experiences, and attributes (communication, critical thinking, leadership abilities, etc.). This will empower an employer to think beyond the veteran candidate's military-learned skills. If you want to attract more veteran applicants, write job descriptions that show a correlation to the specific skill sets many veterans and service members have—appeal to their values and priorities.
- Similarly, it may be unclear to some veterans that their military experience aligns with your job description. Companies that successfully attract veterans correlate job descriptions and skills in an easy-to-follow grid. A Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) translator, such as the one on the Department of Labor (DOL) [Career One Stop page](#), can help both veterans and hiring managers better understand how the skills and experience gained through various military jobs can be applied in the solar industry.
- Avoid judgment around job changes for spouses. Some may have been required to relocate. Interviews should probe for accomplishments, correlative skills, and details revealing their adaptability and ability to manage stressful roles with efficiency and diligence.



## Registered Apprenticeships

Registered Apprenticeships are a proven talent development strategy, and are a great way to recruit veteran talent for a wide variety of occupations. Apprenticeships are based on the “earn while you learn” model, which aids in the recruitment and retention of quality candidates. Registered Apprenticeships offer specific benefits for veterans, who can utilize GI Bill® benefits to receive monthly housing allowance payments and reimbursement for eligible books and supplies while enrolled in a program.

As a DOL Industry Intermediary, IREC leads the **Apprenticeships in Clean Energy (ACE) Network** to offer no-cost technical and financial assistance to employers and other potential sponsors to design and implement Registered Apprenticeship programs.



## Leverage SkillBridge Training Programs

The DOD **SkillBridge program** is an opportunity for service members to gain valuable knowledge and experience to help them prepare for and obtain a civilian job through specific industry training, fellowships, or internships during the last 180 days of service. SkillBridge provides an extremely useful opportunity for service members to explore and prepare for civilian life, while continuing to receive military compensation and benefits. For employers, the program offers a pathway to develop a skilled and motivated workforce through training and work experience, and an opportunity to attract military talent as they are exiting the military and beginning their civilian careers.

The Solar Ready Vets Network develops resources and partnerships to bridge gaps and advance the industry’s efforts to invest in military talent at all levels of the workforce. IREC has cultivated partnerships with several SkillBridge training providers and has created a guide to help employers and training organizations develop and register additional SkillBridge programs for in-demand solar occupations.

Below are three SkillBridge training programs that connect transitioning service members to solar employers for corporate, skilled trades, and field-based roles.

1. **Hiring Our Heroes** connects the military community—service members, military spouses, and veterans—with U.S. businesses to create economic opportunity and a strong and diversified workforce. Through the Solar Ready Vets Network, three SkillBridge **Fellowship** models connect transitioning service members and military spouses with solar employers for 12 weeks at no cost to the employer for on-the-job experience.
  - Corporate Fellowship: service members with at least a bachelor’s degree and leadership experience are placed in management/professional roles, such as project management, business development, communications, policy, HR, operations, logistics, and more.
  - Skills-Based Fellowship: non-degreed service members are placed in skilled trades and entry-level roles. Examples of roles that may be a good fit include skilled trades, construction, installation, technology, administration, and finance.
  - The Military Spouse Fellowship provides military spouses with professional training, networking, and hands-on experience in the civilian workforce.
2. **Airstreams Renewables** prepares transitioning service members and veterans for entry-level careers in the renewable energy, telecommunications, and industrial sectors.
  - Airstreams offers a six-week intensive training program targeting transitioning service members and veterans interested in careers in renewable energy and similar industries.
  - While the training is focused primarily on wind tower technician and cell tower technician skill sets, the training is also relevant to solar roles such as solar installer and Operations and Maintenance (O&M) technician.
  - Training is offered onsite at eight military bases across the country and Airstream’s Main Campus in California.
3. **Home Builders Institute (HBI)** is the nation’s leading nonprofit provider of trade skills training and education for the building industry.
  - A 12-week pre-apprenticeship program offered at 10 military bases across the country prepares transitioning service members for careers in construction.
  - The program primarily offers hands-on instruction focused on basic construction, carpentry, and electrical skills.
  - The program includes career advising and job placement assistance. Solar industry employment outcomes include installation, electrical apprenticeships, and other craft/trade roles.

Outside of the recruiting strategies listed above, below is a list of other key tips to consider:

- Tap into local resources such as educational institutions near military bases and a **local workforce development board**. Another local resource is the **Regional Veterans' Employment Coordinator** contact in your area, as they connect veterans to job resources through employment partnerships. This is particularly useful for small and midsize employers recruiting in a specific geographic area.
- Post jobs where military talent can find them, for example, on the **National Labor Exchange** a resource used by employers to hire job-seekers for open positions with a focus on state and federal agencies, nonprofit and veteran organizations, and disability and diversity partners, all with the goal of recruitment and retention.
- Work with a nonprofit such as **NextOp**, which connects employers to veterans and service members. Posting on military-focused job boards such as **Hire Heroes USA** or **Recruit Military** for a fee is another option.
- Consider reaching out to military veteran-focused staffing/recruiting firms your company could pay to help recruit and hire military talent. One example of a fee-based recruiting firm with a focus on veterans is **Orion Talent**.
- Showcase your company's leadership with the **HIRE Vets Medallion Award**, which recognizes organizations' commitments to veteran hiring and retention.



# Onboarding Veterans and Military-Connected Talent

A critical piece in recruiting and retaining military-connected talent is how they are welcomed and integrated into a company. This is especially important for military-connected talent who may not only be adjusting to a new place of employment and job role, but potentially navigating cultural shifts in the transition from military service to civilian life. Employers should develop a deliberate program that ensures veteran success at every step in the employment cycle.

## Strategies for Effectively Onboarding Military-Connected Talent

- **Create a work plan** for the first few months to the first year of a veteran's employment and provide clear feedback on performance on a regular basis.
- Create a **personalized onboarding process** by scheduling regular check-ins to provide resources and answer any questions that arise. Ensure that your new employee is comfortable with company culture, and processes, as well as administrative tasks such as payroll, timekeeping, and benefits.
- Include an **organizational overview** of your company to help veterans understand where they fit into the team and include in it a review of company policies. Understanding policies that range from your companies' promotion structure to how to make an accommodation request are imperative for new hires.
- Create opportunities for employees to meet and collaborate to support team integration.
- Be flexible with workstation setups and support any needed accommodations for persons with disabilities.
- Share opportunities for **further professional development**, training, and certification with military-connected talent in your company.
- Design a **training for new managers of veterans** to better work with their employees. Include information on supporting veterans with disabilities and employee assistance programs (EAPs).
- Ask for advice and **feedback from other veterans** at your company on what helped them acclimate to the civilian workforce after transitioning from the military.
- Design a **mentoring program** to develop and support military-connected talent "where they are at" to ensure they have the right mix of experience, skills, and personal qualities to assume additional organizational responsibilities and leadership.
- Utilize **Registered Apprenticeships** to provide a structure for learning and career advancement in an occupation. Veterans enrolled in a Registered Apprenticeship program are eligible for GI Bill benefits, including a monthly housing allowance.



# Retaining Veterans and Military-Connected Talent

Organizations successful in retaining military-connected talent create ongoing engagement and opportunities for their employees to develop their careers and connect with their colleagues in meaningful ways.

The following is a list of several strategies that organizations can use to retain military-connected talent, including:

- **Manager Training** – Prior to a new employee being onboarded, provide training for managers on working with military-connected individuals. Training can include tips for managing military-connected individuals such as recognizing specific accomplishments, avoiding micromanagement, and providing robust opportunities for professional development. Create an environment that is welcoming by educating all team members - a workplace in which veterans feel comfortable is key in ensuring that new employees stay at your company. Remind your team that some veterans do not want to be treated any differently than civilian employees - allow new employees to choose what they want to share.
- **Workplace Policies** – Ensure your company has clearly outlined policies to accommodate veterans. This includes policies and resources on **reasonable accommodations** for people with disabilities, National Guard and Reserves policies on leave and scheduling, and resources for veterans and staff to understand the transition for military-connected individuals to a civilian workplace.
- **National Guard and Reserves** – When working with members of the National Guard and Reserves, use the **Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)** to understand employees' workplace rights, including coming back to work after leaves and schedules for training. Ensure your HR staff understands these policies both as an employer and for employees joining your company.
- **Mentorship** – Creating a mentorship program not only supports new military-connected hires, but also allows veterans already working at your company to engage in company-wide veteran resources. Mentorship programs allow veterans at your company to share advice and resources while building relationships between new hires and existing team members.
- **Partnerships** - Build partnerships with military-connected organizations, as they can support employees with resources, employee resource groups, and professional development.
- **Mental health** – Ensure your staff has access to resources for their mental health, such as an **Employee Assistance Program** for counseling, or an HR point-person to go over mental health benefits coverage. Encourage an open dialogue about prioritizing mental wellbeing among your team, such as taking off “mental health” days if needed. Use the guidebook from Hiring Our Heroes titled **Wellbeing in the Workplace: A Practical Guide for Businesses**, as it provides a comprehensive list of resources to understand the needs of veterans in the workplace.



- **Tracking Accomplishments** – Celebrate veterans who are succeeding in the workplace through team shoutouts, recognition during organization wide meetings, and individually during check-ins. Ensuring that new employees know they are doing well is important for retention and overall employee success. Track veteran hiring and retention numbers to understand how your company is doing and create - and share - company wide hiring and retention goals.
- **Team Building** - Foster a team environment to make all new employees feel welcome through team building activities like organized lunches out, mid-day trivia, or opportunities for employees to share non-work accomplishments and updates about their lives. Team building strengthens your team, encourages collaboration, and creates community.
- **Employee Resource Group** – Create a veteran **Employee Resource Group** (ERG) that encourages veterans at your company to collaborate and offer encouragement, support, and advice. Employee Resource Groups allow employees to share their ideas and experiences in a supportive environment. Additionally, veteran ERG's can work with HR to provide advice for interviews or even participate in mock interviews with HR recruiters to help them understand military backgrounds.
- **Flexible and Remote Work** - Creating a flexible work environment with the options of **remote work** is key for successful retention, especially for military spouses and caregivers. Provide flexibility when it comes to employee needs such as possible relocation, childcare needs, and the option for working from home.

# Additional Resources

Below are several additional resources available to employers. Companies may also visit [solarreadyveterans.org](https://solarreadyveterans.org) for more information and resources on recruiting, hiring, and retaining veterans.

## Veterans and Transitioning Service Members

- **Veteran Recruiting & Retention: Practical Strategies for a Veteran-Inclusive Workplace** – Webinar from SEIA
- **SEIA's DEIJ Certification Program** – Training and resources related to DEIJ
- **Military Community at Work** – Resources from the SHRM Foundation, including:
  - **Veterans at Work Certificate program** is a free and open-to-all training resource developed for HR professionals, hiring managers, and front-line supervisors
  - SHRM Foundation's Veterans at Work **Guidebook**
- **Veteran Employee Road Map** – Digital tool from Hiring Our Heroes, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, and USAA
- **US Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS)** – Resources from the VETS office, including:
  - **Employer Guide to Hiring Veterans**
  - Registered Apprenticeships resource on **Hiring Veterans**
- **The JPMorgan Chase Pathfinder Playbook** – A comprehensive guide for employers focused on helping new veterans acclimate to corporate culture with a veteran-peer mentoring program
- **Revisiting the Business Case for Hiring a Veteran** – A report from the Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families
- **HIRE Vets Medallion Award** – A federal-level award that recognizes employers for hiring veterans
- **IREC's National Solar Training Provider Directory** – A training directory that includes GI Bill-eligible solar training programs

## Military Spouses & Caregivers

- **2021 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report** – A report from Blue Star Families
- **"Military spouse unemployment: Exploring solutions to a local problem of national importance"** – An article from Deloitte Consulting LLP
- **"The Force Behind the Force: A Business Case for Leveraging Military Spouses"** – A report from the Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families

# Additional Resources

- **Hiring Our Heroes Military Spouse Fellowship Program** – An overview of the Fellowship Program with next steps for applying
- **Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP)** – Resources on education and career guidance to military spouses
- **Hidden Heroes Programs for Caregivers** – A list of programs from the Elizabeth Dole Foundation
- **Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers** – Resources for employing and retaining caregivers, including remote and flexible work
- **The Hidden Financial Costs of Military Spouse Unemployment** – A report from Hiring Our Heroes
- **Helping Military Spouses Find Careers that Move with Them** – A report from the Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families

## National Guard and Military Reserves

- **National Guard and Military Reserves Explained** – Webpage from Military.com
- **Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR)** – A page with resources including:
  - o **Employer Resource Guide** – A guide to learn about questions to ask members of the guard and reserves, such as those pertaining to scheduling, during onboarding
- **Benefits of Hiring Guardsmen and Reservists** – informational webpage from the ESGR website