



Briefing Document for  
The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs  
Study on the National Strategy on Employment After Service

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## **BRIEFING DOCUMENT ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE NATIONAL STRATEGY ON EMPLOYMENT AFTER SERVICE**

**FROM:** Lisa Taylor, Challenge Factory  
**TO:** Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg, Chair, Standing Committee on Veteran Affairs  
**DATE** February 13, 2023  
**RE:** National Strategy for Veterans Employment After Service

### **ISSUE STATEMENT**

The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs is conducting a consultation process to inform the *National Strategy for Veterans Employment After Service*.

### **PURPOSE**

This briefing memo outlines the benefits that the use of a career development lens and employer-focused lens will provide to the Standing Committee on Veteran Affairs in designing a *National Strategy for Veterans Employment After Service*.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Use a Career Development model when designing the *National Strategy for Veterans Employment After Service*, and adhere to the Canadian National Competency Framework for Career Development Professionals when outlining any service or intervention to be included in the strategy.
2. Focus on equipping Veterans with career agency rather than identifying specific jobs or career paths for them.
3. Make it easier for small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the private and non-profit sectors to hire Veterans through employer-focused supports and incentives.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

Consultation phase of the National Strategy for Veterans Employment After Service.

## BACKGROUND

### The Canadian Labour Market

- Canada's labour market is shifting and Future of Work considerations must play an integral role in any overall workforce planning strategies.
  - Veterans are often matched with traditional streams of career opportunities, despite their individual skillsets and interests.
  - Designing a strategy that is responsive to labour market needs and changes will increase positive Veteran hiring outcomes.
  - In British Columbia, for example, high opportunity occupations include healthcare and social assistance, professional, scientific, and technical services, retail trade, construction, and educational services.

#### *Veteran Career Transition*

- Career transition is about more than jobs or training programs.
- Direct skills or job matching from military to civilian environments has led us to a current situation where Veterans transition with an awareness of four types of work: public sector, security, coding/cyber, start a business.
- These limited job types and approaches to civilian career development do not sufficiently guarantee Veterans will have meaningful, satisfying career paths, despite having good skills.
- Job satisfaction and retention has to do with how roles and cultures align with intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and reward.
  - For example, a Veteran may have the skills to do security. But, the reason why they liked their career in military service where they used those particular skills, was about the overall camaraderie, collective understanding of mission, and continued opportunity to learn. These elements may not be present in the civilian security job.

#### *How Do Veterans Compare?*

- The Standing Committee has already heard from other witnesses that each year 4,000-5,000 Canadian Armed Forces members re-enter civilian life with the intent to seek employment and approximately 2,500 Veterans seek education of some kind post-release.
- The Committee has already identified employment rate differences between men and women Veterans as an important area of study and consideration. While this is important, it should also be done within a broader context of employment rate differences between men and women Canadian civilians.

Table 1: Historical Policy/Statistics Metrics Used to Assess and Benchmark Work Related Activities

	% Veterans			% Civilians		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Unemployed	5%	F	5%	5.2%	4.8%	5%
Employment	61%	49%	60%	65.8%	58.5%	62.1%
Job Satisfaction	N/A	N/A	79%	82.8%	85.2%	83.9%

F= too few to calculate a reliable estimate. Civilian %'s are as of December 2022 and Veteran %'s are as of 2019 (Findings from LASS 2019 Survey).

### Veteran Identity

In 2019, 172 CAF members and Veterans participated in a study to quantify Veteran culture fit in civilian workplaces and employer bias related to Veterans.

- The actual differences between Veteran and regular Canadian civilian workplace behaviours and characteristics are minor.
  - Employers incorrectly believe there are differences in workplace behaviour and communication style between Veterans and regular civilians.
- Compared to the general population, Veterans are:
  - more curious and receptive;
  - more innovative and flexible;
  - less commanding and more collaborative; and,
  - better critical thinkers and problem solvers.
- However, employers often believe that Veterans are:
  - less curious and receptive;
  - less innovative and flexible;
  - more commanding and less collaborative;
  - poorer critical thinkers and problem solvers; and,
  - less grounded and calm.
- Biases can lead employers to be concerned about cultural fit when interviewing or hiring a Veteran.
  - Understanding biases supports Veterans and Veteran-serving organizations to tailor career services to address specific employer concerns and ensure perceptions are founded in data.
- Significant differences exist between what employers believe Veterans will see as desirable, engaging work and what type of work motivates and engages Veterans.
  - Mismatches can lead employers to identify job roles that seem like a good fit on the surface, not what will lead to overall satisfaction for the Veteran.

- Employers are prone to offering employment packages (including benefits, bonuses, and rewards) that are not aligned with what is meaningful or most appreciated by Veteran employees.
- When not properly recognized and rewarded, Veteran engagement levels decline and retention becomes an issue.
- There is a need to decode why Veterans do not struggle to find a job upon release, but have lower than expected retention rates and experience chronic underemployment.

### **Career Development**

The formal field of career development can provide essential solutions that address the complexity of Veteran transition, including the intersection of Veteran identity, work, life, and learning across the entire lifespan.

- Career development improves successful career transitions through job support and the development of new skills.
- Vulnerable groups are more motivated to access new learning opportunities and increase their adaptability in the labour market if they use career development and guidance.
- Formal standards, indicators, competencies, and metrics already exist to ensure career services are done right.
  - A national committee within Canada's career development sector has created a Competency Framework for Career Development Professionals.

### **Small- to Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)**

Canada's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for more than 90 percent of private sector jobs in Canada. (SMEs account for most jobs in Canada.)

- For Veterans, SMEs are not only providers of employment but also providers of critical social structures to assist with the social integration of Veterans into civilian communities across the country.
- SMEs have limited Human Resources capacity, including informal recruitment and onboarding processes.
- Unlike large enterprises, SMEs do not have formal Veteran hiring programs to advertise or promote—yet Veterans have skills, including the capacity to learn, that can help SMEs fill essential roles.
- Veterans do not only live in major urban centres, nor do they want to. Similarly, SMEs are found in all communities across Canada, not only in major urban centres.
- A 2021 study of how employers use Challenge Factory's three Veteran hiring resources found that amidst ongoing labour shortages, small businesses can build confidence in both their overall hiring and Veteran-specific hiring practices.

- A 2021 study of how employers use Challenge Factory’s three Veteran hiring resources found that employer-focused resources can change how employers think about Veterans in the workplace.
  - Over six months, employers who had not previously hired a Veteran had hired 205 people, of which 25 were Veterans.

## ANALYSIS

**Recommendation 1:** Use a Career Development model when designing the National Strategy for Veterans Employment After Service and adhere to the Canadian National Competency Framework for Career Development Professionals when outlining any service or intervention to be included in the strategy.

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) sets out four mandates: Provide, Help, Listen, and Engage.

Recommendation 1 aligns with VAC’s mandate to “Provide”:

- Career transition is complex, with employment intrinsically linked to mental and physical health, financial stability, housing, education and training, family obligations and supports, and other areas where government support and services are offered.
- Overall well-being and sense of purpose is achieved when strong employment and community connections are made.
- An employment strategy based in career development models ensures a focus on gainful employment, in decent work, with clear linkages and coordination to adjacent and related services and supports.
- A career development approach and lens is fundamentally tied to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), with Canada’s career development sector devoting significant resources to improving DEI in workplaces across the country.

**Recommendation 2:** Focus on equipping Veterans with career agency rather than identifying specific jobs or career paths for them.

Recommendation 2 aligns with VAC’s mandate to “Help”:

- Career transitions always impact identity and sense of self. For Veterans, the impact on identity is more extreme than in typical civilian career transitions.
- To maintain a leadership role in the care and support of Veterans and their families through this time of transition, VAC should:
  - Focus on helping Veterans establish a healthy identity within civilian environments; and,
  - Focus on helping Veterans understand their strengths and foster their independence and confidence to make career and employment decisions.
- Veterans need support to understand the breadth of civilian career possibilities and options available to them before specific jobs or career paths are recommended.

- Leadership in this area must include an ability to guide Veterans without prescribing “typical” or “good” jobs for Veterans, as they are able to work in many different roles and environments.

**Recommendation 3:** Make it easier for small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the private and non-profit sectors to hire Veterans through employer-focused supports and incentives.

Recommendation 3 advances VAC’s overall mandate to support the well-being of Veterans and their families by:

- Taking a labour market approach to Veteran hiring outcomes.
  - By addressing both the labour supply (Veterans) and demand (employers) sides of the labour market equation, VAC can increase the likelihood that employers will hire Veterans.
- Busting myths about Veterans so that employers become aware of the unique skill sets that Veterans bring to civilian workplaces.
- Solving concrete problems for employers like labour and skills shortages, recruitment capacity gaps, and employee retention.



## ABOUT CHALLENGE FACTORY

Challenge Factory is a Canadian research agency and consultancy focused on the Future of Work. As a certified B Corporation, we focus on using business as a force for good and advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

For more than 10 years, Challenge Factory has been working to close the gap between employers and the hidden talent pool of Canada's military Veterans. Through our research, consulting, and training, we raise awareness about the benefits of hiring Veterans, give employers tools that will make hiring easier, and draw on Veterans' knowledge to make sure we get it right.

[www.challengefactory.ca](http://www.challengefactory.ca)

Challenge Factory Veteran research:

<https://community.challengefactory.ca/community/tools-and-research/hiring-military-veterans/>



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