



Accelerating economic opportunities for highly skilled veterans

Verified skills are powerful tools for helping veterans succeed in a post-COVID economy

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Introduction and Background

Veterans services such as healthcare, education, housing assistance, and pensions are commonly cited and discussed by many.

Meanwhile, the topics of veteran employment and post-military careers, and the systemic employment challenges faced by military spouses, rarely get airtime.

Veterans – by definition – come from a culture of mission and task accomplishment. Our former military service members have completed rigorous training and they know how to deliver. They are also much more likely than civilians to hold one or more professional credentials, according to this survey. Yet corporations across the country rarely prioritize hiring veterans. Instead, employers cite skills mismatch, acclimation fears, and even negative stereotypes as reasons for not hiring veterans.¹ While veteran employment rates are historically comparable with non-veteran employment rates,² veterans must still contend with these challenges.

More than one-third of veterans say their employment is a top concern, and that financial readiness is a major lifestyle stressor among military families.³ Merit strongly believes in hiring veterans, and more than 10% of our colleagues are former service members. There are many ways to help support better employment outcomes for veterans – including veteran mentorship of service members, plus an adoption of technologies that can help verify and translate the skills gained while in the service. But the first step is bringing awareness to the challenges.

We recently surveyed 500 veterans from across the U.S. to understand their skills, opportunities, and outlook on their future employment and financial readiness.

¹ 5 Reasons Why Employers Are Not Hiring Vets, <https://www.military.com/hiring-veterans/resources/5-reasons-why-employers-are-not-hiring-vets.html>

² Pew Research, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/17/how-veterans-and-non-veterans-fare-in-the-u-s-job-market/>

³ 2018 Blue Star Families' annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey, <https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2018MFLS-Executive-Summary-DIGITAL-FINAL.pdf>

Executive Summary and Key Findings

Unemployment is relatively high among veterans.

Veteran employment levels have historically been in line or slightly stronger than civilian employment levels. But as of September 2020, when unemployment rates were higher overall due to the COVID-19-related pandemic⁴, 9.4% of veterans we surveyed said they were unemployed and looking for work, compared to 7.9% civilian unemployment recorded by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.⁵

Licenses and credentials are more critical for veterans.

The vast majority (77.6%) of veterans surveyed for our report hold at least one license or credential to work, compared to under one quarter (23.7%) of the civilian workforce.⁶ Among those veterans we surveyed who have a license or credential, nearly half (47.9%) have had to be re-credentialed in order to work in another state.

Veterans are lifelong learners.

A large majority (82.8%) of veteran respondents say they are likely to pursue additional skills trainings, certificates, or work credentials to find future employment.

Connecting Military Experience to the Civilian Professional World

Veterans bring their leadership skills and expertise to civilian professions – but it doesn't always mean it's an easy match. Fortunately, 74.4% of the veterans surveyed said their skills and/or experience in the military directly translated to the job(s) they've had as a civilian. But 42.6% said it was somewhat or very difficult to match their military experience and skills to a civilian job.

Whether or not respondents were employed, most thought their military service helped them get a job or acquire credentials for work.

KEY FINDINGS

9.4%
vs. 7.9%

Veterans we surveyed reported being unemployed at a higher rate than the civilian unemployment rate in September 2020.

77.6%
vs. 23.7%

More than 3/4 of veterans surveyed hold at least one license or credential to work, compared to less than 1/4 of the civilian workforce.

>82%

Most veteran respondents are willing to pursue additional credentials to work.

Of currently employed veterans not looking for work:

- **51.6%** said it was easier to get a civilian job as veteran.
- **79.8%** said their military experience made it easier to achieve any credentials required for work.

Of currently unemployed veterans looking for work:

- **27.7%** said it was easier to get a job as a veteran.
- **73.5%** said their military experience made it easier to achieve any credentials required for work.

Among the respondents who said it was easier to get a job as a veteran (47%):

- **5.5%** are unemployed and looking for work.
- **37.5%** said it was somewhat or very difficult to match military experience and skills to a civilian job.
- **87.7%** said they were likely to pursue additional skills trainings, certificates, or work credentials to help find future employment.

Meanwhile, 20.2% of respondents said it was harder to get a job as a veteran. Among those responses:

- **14.9%** are unemployed and looking for work.
- **69.3%** said it was somewhat or very difficult to match military experience and skills to a civilian job.
- However, most (89.1%) respondents who said it was harder to get a job as a veteran also said they were likely to pursue additional skills trainings, certificates, or work credentials to help find future employment.

TRANSLATING MILITARY EXPERIENCE TO CIVILIAN WORK

74.4%

Most veterans surveyed said their skills and/or experience in the military directly translated to the job(s) they've had as a civilian.

51.6%

About half of employed veterans said it was easier to get a civilian job as veteran.

27.7%

Just over a quarter of unemployed veterans found it easier to get a job as a veteran.

⁴ Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on The Employment Situation for September 2020, <https://www.bls.gov/covid19/employment-situation-covid19-faq-september-2020.htm>

⁵ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/charts/employment-situation/civilian-unemployment-rate.htm>

⁶ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat49.htm>

Employment Opportunities and Challenges for Veterans

Of the veterans we surveyed, 9.4% were unemployed and looking for work, with an additional 15.8% employed, but looking for more work. Meanwhile, unemployed veterans and employed veterans **not** looking for work (61.2% of respondents) shared three of the top industries in common: health and medicine; education; and business, management and administration.

The top industries for all respondents:

- Business, management, and administration
- Education
- Health and medicine
- Architecture and engineering
- Science and technology

The job fields with the highest number of employed veterans looking for more work:

- Community and social services
- Science and technology
- Architecture and engineering
- Education

The job fields with the highest number of unemployed veterans:

- Health and medicine
- Education
- Arts, culture, and entertainment
- Business, management and administration

But one thing many employed veterans have in common: most of them have professional licenses or credentials.

VETERANS AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS

9.4%

Veterans who are unemployed.

15.8%

Veterans who are employed, but looking for more work.

61.2%

Veterans who are employed and not looking for work.

Validated Credentials the Key to Higher Veteran Employment

Holding a license or credential is a crucial requirement for most professional work, and veterans tend to outpace civilians in that respect. Among the respondents, 77.6% of veterans hold at least one license or credential to work, compared to 23.7% of civilian workers who hold a license or credential to work.⁷

Most veterans we surveyed who held licenses or credentials (79.9%) said their life in the military made it easier to obtain those crucial licenses and credentials.

Meanwhile, 80.4% of respondents with licenses or credentials said those credentials are related to what they trained for or did in the military.

Of the 25.6% of veterans who said their skills and/or experience in the military did not directly translate to the job(s) they've had as a civilian, 50% hold one or more credentials to work (and 82.8% indicate they are likely to pursue additional skills trainings, certificates, or work credentials to find future employment, because it would help financially, with employment, or both).

Meanwhile, of the majority of veterans who said their military skills and experience did translate to their jobs – 87.1% hold one or more work credentials. Of currently employed veterans not looking for work, 79.4% hold at least one license or credential to work.

It's clear that credentials are very important to working veterans. And our respondents did share concerns about the portability and ready access to those credentials.

- **47.9%** of credential-holders said they've had to be re-credentialed in order to work in another state.
- **59%** cited “easy access to licenses/credentials” as a top concern. Less than half cited credentials sharing, expiration date visibility, and interstate reciprocity as a concern.

VETERAN CREDENTIALS

79.9%

Most veterans said their life in the military made it easier to obtain licenses and credentials.

80.4%

Most veterans with licenses or credentials said those credentials are related to what they trained for or did in the military.

49.9%

Nearly half of credential-holders said they've had to be re-credentialed in order to work in another state.

59%

Most cited “easy access to licenses/credentials” as a top concern.

⁷ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat49.htm>

Veterans' Economic Outlook

In the midst of 2020's COVID-19-related economic recession, most respondents reported being in a stable place financially – 55% of respondents said their financial situation was “comfortable.” Meanwhile, 38.2% said they were “making ends meet,” and 6.8% said they were struggling.

Looking ahead, 51% of respondents overall expect their financial situation to improve, and 44.4% overall expect additional employment opportunities in the next 6 to 12 months. Of the veterans who expect additional employment opportunities, 81.1% expect an improved financial situation in 6 to 12 months.

Among respondents who reported to be financially struggling (note: this is a base of 34 people), 35.3% expect their financial situation to worsen, and 32.4% expect fewer employment opportunities.

Among veterans who are unemployed and looking for work:

- 17.0% say they are financially struggling
- 46.8% expect fewer employment opportunities in the next 6 to 12 months

The economic uncertainty of 2020 has left some veterans in a challenging position, but there are steps states can take to connect those veterans with the right work opportunities.

Conclusion: The Way Forward

Many employers see the benefits of hiring veterans, yet many others don't prioritize hiring them. Some employers cite being dissuaded from hiring veterans due to concerns (valid or not) of skills mismatch or potential future deployments, or because they worry their hires might not acclimate to a civilian job.⁸

VETERANS AND THE ECONOMY

55%

More than half of respondents said their financial situation in the 2020 economy was “comfortable.”

38.2%

Over a third said they were “making ends meet” in the current economy.

6.8%

Some veterans said they were struggling in the current economy.

For the many service members who do find it challenging to translate their military skills and expertise to the civilian world, it can be worth seeking out a mentor in their chosen career field to help them make that transition. There are many organizations that specialize in helping service members match and translate their skills into the civilian workforce. But there is also a clear need for technology to track, translate, and verify skills gained in service – including mapping them to civilian skillsets so employers and candidates alike can compare apples to apples.

But veteran employees bring a lot of value to the table. Veterans carry more credentials than civilians do on average, and, with a growth-oriented mindset, they're willing to invest in more training and certification for their careers.

Meanwhile, employers can help close the gap by committing to actively recruit more veterans. They can connect with veterans organizations and the Department of Labor's veterans job boards to find candidates, or ask their veteran employees to refer fellow veterans for open positions. They can also create a support system by asking veteran employees to mentor new hires who are newly transitioning into the civilian workforce.⁹

States can also step in and help veteran constituents connect with jobs faster. Since veterans are generally a well credentialed population, states' licensing and regulation agencies might consider adopting programs or technologies to ease the process of verifying or accessing credentials. This can help more veterans and their spouses connect with meaningful employment.

Hopefully, by highlighting the challenges many veterans face in the civilian workforce, we can forge a clearer path to connecting them with the best opportunities that put their skills and expertise to use.

NEXT STEPS

Mentorship

Service members should take advantage of mentorship programs – offered by the government, veterans groups, and private organizations – to help them translate their military skills for the civilian workforce.

Technology

State governments can help veterans access, verify, and share their work credentials by adopting technologies that help cut through typical red tape.

Employer Outreach

Companies can commit to actively recruiting more veterans by reaching out to veterans organizations and tapping into their own veteran employee network for good candidates.

⁸ 5 Reasons Why Employers Are Not Hiring Vets, <https://www.military.com/hiring-veterans/resources/5-reasons-why-employers-are-not-hiring-vets.html>

⁹ Five Things to Help Recruit Veterans to Your Business, <https://www.military.com/hiring-veterans/resources/how-to-recruit-veterans-for-your-business.html>

About this Report

Merit conducted a survey of 500 veterans in October 2020 to get a better understanding of the employment and economic challenges that veterans face today.

Survey Respondents

Of the 500 eligible respondents, 50.2% identified as female and 49.8% as male. 16.2% were 18-24 years old, 23.4% were 25-34 years old, 33.8% were 35-44 years old, 12% were 45-54 years old, and 14.6% were over 54 years in age.

Additional respondent demographic details:

- **71.2%** had a spouse or domestic partner while an active service member.
- **57.6%** had children while an active service member.

Methodology

Merit conducted this survey online through Pollfish on October 16, 2020, to gather 500 responses from self-identified U.S. veterans.

Pollfish utilizes a survey methodology called Random Device Engagement to deliver surveys inside popular mobile apps, and uses non-monetary incentives such as an extra life in a game or access to premium content that users were already engaged with. The platform also uses additional layers of survey fraud prevention, including artificial intelligence and machine learning to remove potentially biased responses and improve data quality.¹⁰

About Merit

Merit is the interoperable ecosystem for all digital credentials issued by trusted organizations. The platform allows everyone to access, track, and organize their licenses and credentials in real-time. Merit works with more than 1,000 organizations for professional licensing, occupational regulation, workforce development, emergency services, and other digital credentialing needs.

For more information or to request a demo, visit merits.com

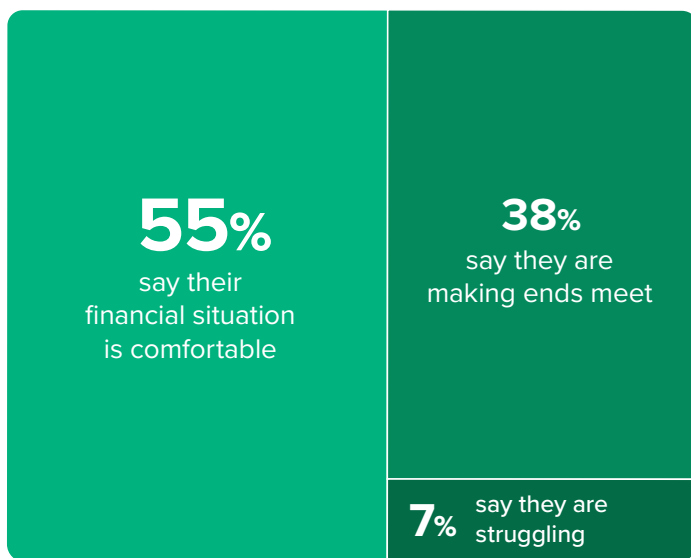
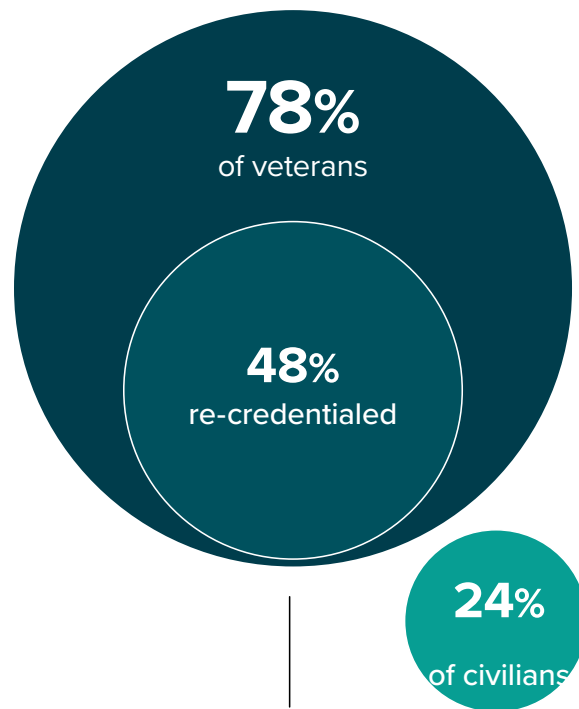
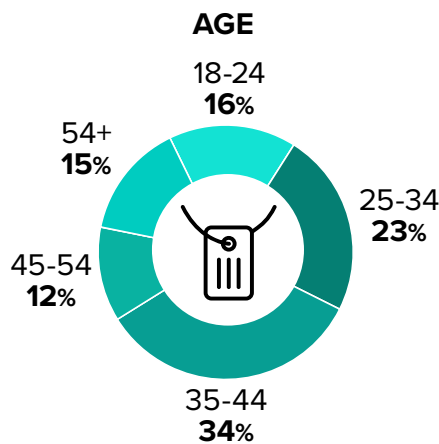
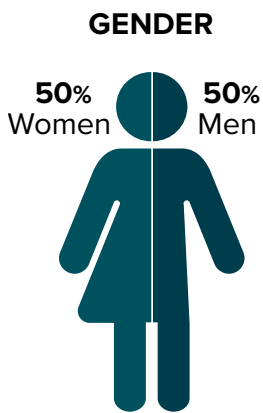
¹⁰ How the Pollfish methodology works, <https://resources.pollfish.com/pollfish-school/how-the-pollfish-methodology-works/>

Veteran Employment: The Challenges and Opportunities

We recently surveyed 500 veterans from across the U.S. to understand their skills, opportunities, and outlook on their future employment and financial readiness.

Of the 500 veterans surveyed:

78% of veterans hold at least one license or credential to work, compared to 24% of the civilian workforce¹¹



Among veterans with a license or credential, **48% have had to be re-credentialed** in order to work in another state

83%

of veterans say they are likely to pursue additional skills trainings, certificates, or work credentials to find future employment



Top lines of work for employed veterans not looking for work:

- Business, management & administration
- Education
- Health & medicine

For unemployed veterans:

- Health & medicine
- Education
- Arts, culture, & entertainment

9% of veterans we surveyed say they are unemployed and looking for work, compared to 8% civilian unemployment¹²

20%

Said it was harder to get a job as a veteran

47%

Said it was easier to get a job as a veteran

15%

Are unemployed & looking for work

6%

Are unemployed & looking for work

¹¹U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat49.htm>

¹²U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/charts/employment-situation/civilian-unemployment-rate.htm>