Opportunities to Leverage Program Effectiveness via Partnerships

**Interagency Network of Enterprise Assistance Providers**

**November 2012 Meeting Summary**

**Host**

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

**Purpose of INEAP**

Monthly forum where business and technical-assistance program-partnership catalysts meet in support of small businesses to initiate relationships and exchange information across organizational boundaries for the purposes of leveraging public-private resources and promoting innovative activities that accelerate domestic economic development.

**Welcome and Opening Remarks**

***Speaker: Heidi Sheppard, Manufacturing Extension Partnership, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Department of Commerce***

Attendees were welcomed to the November 2012 Interagency Network of Enterprise Assistance Providers (INEAP) meeting convened at EPA’s office located at 1201 Constitution Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20460. Special thanks were extended to the meeting host and the EPA. Interest was expressed in what the EPA is doing and how INEAP can help support the agency’s mission by identifying key steps to accelerate veterans in the job force.

***Speaker: Tanya Mottley, Director, Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention, Environmental Protection Agency***

Ms. Mottley thanked attendees on behalf the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention and noted the appropriateness of November to celebrate and thank veterans and their families for their sacrifice and service to the country. She outlined a framework for the discussion to identify gaps that need to be filled for strengthening the economy through the placement of veterans in small- to medium-sized enterprises. She described an objective to share information on successes and how to achieve it. She highlighted the 2012 Advanced Manufacturing Partnership Steering Committee report presented to the President of the United States entitled, “[Capturing Domestic Competitive Advantage in Advanced Manufacturing](http://links.govdelivery.com/track?type=click&enid=ZWFzPTEmbWFpbGluZ2lkPTIwMTIxMTI2LjEyNTY3MzIxJm1lc3NhZ2VpZD1NREItUFJELUJVTC0yMDEyMTEyNi4xMjU2NzMyMSZkYXRhYmFzZWlkPTEwMDEmc2VyaWFsPTE3Mjg1MzI4JmVtYWlsaWQ9Ymtpc3NpY2tAYS10ZWFtc29sdXRpb25zLmNvbSZ1c2VyaWQ9Ymtpc3NpY2tAYS10ZWFtc29sdXRpb25zLmNvbSZmbD0mZXh0cmE9TXVsdGl2YXJpYXRlSWQ9JiYm&&&101&&&http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/pcast_amp_steering_committee_report_final_july_17_2012.pdf)”, and specifically addressed recommendation number 8 of the report for tapping the talent pool of returning veterans and the two main obstacles to overcome. These include:

* Ensuring that veterans are aware of opportunities for careers in manufacturing
* Equating military skills with private sector requirements

# Featured Presentations

The November meeting focused on the challenge of how to create a stronger pull from small- to medium-sized enterprises that will lead to a significant increase in the placement of veterans in the manufacturing space.

The agenda featured speaker presentations by several federal agencies in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the nature and extent of the various federal, state, and local programs focused on veterans and to look at ways that INEAP can collaborate in order to improve manufacturing job placement for veterans. INEAP has a unique opportunity to share ideas and outline steps to accelerate the pace of veterans’ employment in the private sector.

After introductions of attendees in the room and via teleconference, and delivery of the five speaker presentations, the meeting continued with roundtable discussions and announcements.

**Department of Labor – Veterans Programs**

***Speakers: Andrew Ridgeway, Workforce Analyst, Office of Workforce Investment and Pam Frugoli, Veterans Retraining and Assistance Program***

Mr. Ridgeway provided an overview of the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP), which was created in 2011 in collaboration with the Department of Labor and had just celebrated its one year anniversary. The program has established a 12-month training session for occupational courses and specifically targets vocational skills in manufacturing occupations that are highly sought after as determined by Department of Labor statistics. Tuition is paid directly to veterans for courses in a high demand fields and may include other necessities such as boarding, transportation, and childcare. Some of the unique eligibility requirements are that members must:

* Be between the ages of 35-60
* Have been honorably discharged from the Department of Defense
* Not be eligible for GI benefits

This program is beneficial for 99,000 veterans over a two year period.

* 18,000 veterans are currently enrolled in training at Community Colleges for high demand manufacturing trades such as welders, machinists, computer numerical control (CNC) operators, front line supervisors, and inspectors.
* The average cost is $1,500 per month per person for training, or $18,000 per year.

Many education programs do not have follow-ups for job placement, but the center’s dedicated staff works to fill that void. Employment outcomes are a focus of center staff. Employers interested in hiring veterans can contact the Department of Labor, Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) and the Department of Veterans Affairs, which represent the public workforce system. The American Job Center offers assistance in getting a certification or degree, finding work, and partnering with community colleges or other outreach staff, as well as access to want advertisements and websites.

Barriers to overcome include a challenge in training veterans and identifying employers willing to hire them. Mismatches do happen and it reinforces the importance to qualify individuals for positions. This facilitates a need to look at military occupations as they relate to civilian occupations. Many people fail to realize that simply matching the title of a military occupation at the level of work performed is not adequate, as field work is often very different in a military environment as opposed to a civilian environment. Often, some training will still be needed.

Another possibility is to look at other civilian occupations to which military training might relate. In assigning appropriate credentials, one must identify and communicate to licensing boards what a veteran has learned. A possible way to bridge the gap is by encouraging licensing boards to give a temporary license in addition to learning and training on the job. The Department of Defense is working on demo training for enlistees who are still in the military to obtain the training before leaving the service.

**Small Business Administration – Veterans Programs**

***Speaker: Rhett Jeppson, Associate Administrator for the Office of Veterans Business Development***

Mr. Jeppson provided insight on what his office is doing to provide assistance to veteran-owned small businesses and their development. He articulated specific ways the group works to better create a support environment such as the “Boots to Business” program. Statistics on small veteran-owned business start ups demonstrate that veterans very well may excel at this endeavor due to having a specialized knowledge and ability to take initiative.

* Less than 1 in 10 small businesses are owned by a veteran.
* 45% of veterans are more likely to be small business owners than their counterparts.

**Boots to Business Program**

The focus of the Boots to Business program is to help service members transition into being successful business owners. Many veterans want to start their own businesses, and the Small Business Administration (SBA) offers a business program tailored to their needs. The program is composed of a two-day class on business development and also offers an eight-week program with a local university to develop a business plan.

One third of the class is made up of senior officers, one third of senior staff, and the remaining one third of first term enlistees. The program is also open to spouses of veterans as it is recognized that they too have made a significant sacrifice. The program seeks connections with outreach centers interested in admitting small businesses to the network.

The program also provides access to capital to those who do not have equity by assisting in an application for a grant or loan. This is a powerful economic segment in a country with a proven track record. This offers a great resource partner network, including government employees, who are scattered around the country in 66 locations to provide assistance to small business owners. A learning curve exists as successful small business owners are usually on their second or third try.

**Society of Manufacturing Engineers – Vet Certification Programs**

***Speaker: Pam Hurt, Industry Manager, Workforce Development***

The Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME) is an 80 year old professional society that focuses on working with individuals in a one-on-one setting instead of companies or large units. One-to-one conversation makes the difference. The SME only offers testing and assessment and leaves the education portion to the community colleges. The certification role varies from foundational certification, such as validating a high school diploma, to higher end qualifications.

Certifications offer a set of standards that companies can recognize, and the certifications offered through the SME are valuable throughout the country. There are five levels of certifications available through the SME that measure knowledge certified against work, including:

* Bronze
* Silver
* Gold
* Manufacturing Technologist with a four-year degree
* Manufacturing Engineer with a four-year degree and four years of experience

Testing can be completed anywhere in the world and the certifications last three years. There are currently 600,000 open jobs in manufacturing with which veterans can be matched.

Each government and nonprofit group has individual training methods. For example, the Army is testing the Bronze and Manufacturing Technologist certification to determine if its education gives workers enough information to pass the test. The Army is also identifying what changes to existing structure and projects should be added to the worker’s portfolio to meet the requirements. One drawback noticed so far is that service members run out of time to get enough training.

***ToolingU***

ToolingU is an online resource that offers 400 courses dedicated to manufacturing targeting the technician level.

It includes a pre-assessment test for personnel, an individual education plan that is available 24/7 anywhere in the world, and a post-assessment test to make sure the education was delivered.

ToolingU is modular and individualized so a veteran can pick and choose a program that best suits the required courses needed for a particular occupation. Once a service member has passed the test, he or she is not required to pay for it.

ToolingU’s focus is to get industry certifications translatable in a form that companies understand.

Certifications are not as stringent as licensing but are a step on the way to more advanced training. They may also assist a veteran in finding a job or getting a foot in the door into a particular industry.

Encouraging employers to hire based on certifications improves relevancy on certifications and makes for a more flexible, skilled, and better workforce, thereby creating a push and pull to hiring veterans.

**The Perspective from the Small- to Medium-sized Manufacturer**

***Speaker: Stacey Wagner, Manager, Workforce Systems Development, Manufacturing Extension Partnership***

Ms. Wagner provided insight on incorporating workforce strategy that manufacturers need to adopt. Companies often look at sustainability, new machinery, supply chain, and/or energy but fail to focus on the need for workforce development. People are seen as dispensable, especially the manufacturing worker. There is a need for manufacturers to look at the workforce as a system. They are measuring investments in technology, so then why not also workforce? When looking at the return on investment in the workforce, veterans may provide a worthwhile contribution.

The Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) offers no specific veteran program but a network of 60 centers to work with small- and medium-sized manufacturers in public-private partnerships that is given leeway to customize the business approach. A prime example is the MEP center in southern Virginia, which adopted a program called GENEDGE for working with Veterans Affairs in an E3 (economy, energy, and environment) state initiative economic development project. The initiative is not about making the veterans a perfect match for the employer but instead asking if employers can support veterans.

MEP centers perform audits of employers for commitment and find positions that pay better than minimum wage while ensuring that a career path and mentor are available for the worker. An employer can get help from a MEP center on meeting these criteria and can then be provided with access to veterans.

Mobile training centers are popular and consist of a truck with an operations system inside with the ability to travel to various businesses. As a state supported initiative, this means they can travel and work throughout the entire state.

**American Association of Community Colleges – Veterans Assistance in the Community College System**

***Speaker: Jen Worth, Program Manager, Center for Workforce and Economic Development***

Ms. Worth gave an explanation of what community colleges do for families as well as active service members. She acknowledged the success of her association is based partly on the great relationship it has with MEP centers and other associations such as the Appalachian Regional Commission. The colleges are seen as community hosts, and this is very important for advancing growths and employment opportunities. Stock institutions have four key factors that set them apart from other institutions:

* They offer reasonable transfer credits
* They reduce on-campus residency
* They offer credit for military training or experience
* They offer credit from nationally recognized testing programs

Community colleges offer a flexible and adaptable open learning style. Large manufacturing programs frequently contact community colleges seeking students for employment.

**Roundtable Discussions**

***Opportunities for Agencies to Partner with Other Agencies for Program Implementations Discussed in the Meeting***

* Veterans Affairs works with the EPA to develop projects that support veterans’ employment. For example, they set up a ride program for veterans to see if they like the open positions in a company, and it also gives them an opportunity to see the facility first-hand. Many veterans these days have the ability to do wastewater jobs, are very trainable, well skilled, and are just missing certain certifications.
* MEP is working everyday with facilities that want to hire veterans and can collaborate with other resources to broaden the network nationally. MEP has launched cross-agency programs, such as E3.
* Community colleges work in the field on the academic side of training to help veterans for placement.

***Programs, Initiatives, and Services to Be Implemented to Assist Veterans with Job Opportunities***

* Apprenticeships are helpful in the military transition to civilian placement, but the service seems to have gotten away from this in recent years. Talking with experts to identify gaps in military training, and then adding these into the training and offering credit recommendations, would be an example of implementing a service to assist with veteran job opportunities.
* VetSuccess.gov is a free tool that veterans and employers can use. It filters resumes by field, security clearance, and other specifications employers can use when seeking new hires. It is also a tool for veterans who are unemployed or underemployed to distribute their information. A local office employer can contact Veterans Affairs to find veterans nationwide.
* Center staff shall identify center competencies, including seeking the help of specialists and performance consulting. A field visit to the manufacturing enterprise to learn about the organization will aid staff in knowing what is needed, and if the center cannot help it can tap into a network of resources to find another program that can help. This brings a small business mindset to involve a larger chain.

***Where Efforts Can Be Strengthened through Collaboration at the Regional and Local Levels***

* Getting companies to follow recommendations through audits can help them identify waste and foster a more effective business plan, such as saving on energy. Engagement in conversations and working closely with the companies is necessary.
* Veteran-owned companies can be matched with a service or product needed by the Department of Defense.
* INEAP meetings were created to motivate people to go out and take action. Delivery systems such as social media websites and webinars ensure that information does not end in the meeting but that the word continues to be spread and reaches more companies. This makes certain that services not offered through MEP can be found in other resources through the network.
* Recruiting, hiring, and retaining access to veterans requires a close look at relationships versus partnerships. The military must validate an organization to educate veterans, similar to what the United Services Automobile Association (USAA) has done. The federal government is seen as another world from the military, but veterans possess many skills that would be valuable in a government setting. Recruiters are actually in the community, not in a military installation. A company needs the right connections with people to gain veteran trust.
* The Coast Guard and Reserve did well in providing certifications valuable in civilian fields. Parallel training between military and civilian certifications are helpful. An example of this is the Army program of instruction (POI) with paralegal certification or the nursing program. Getting noncombat women to identify as a veteran is another obstacle worth exploring because this is a group of people with many skills to offer.
* Companies need to identify what soft skills they need and what individuals they want regarding gender, experience, and age. What knowledge is needed and what can be learned on the job is going to be different for a junior versus a mid-level or upper management position.

**Announcements and Concluding Comments**

* Host, speakers, and attendees were thanked for their continued support of INEAP.
* Attendees were encouraged to share any type of collaboration tools, such as interagency agreements, alliance agreements, memoranda of understanding, or web casts, which can be posted on INEAP’s web site to help foster collaboration efforts. The web address for INEAP is <http://www.ineap.gov/>.

**Next Meeting**

Date: January 16, 2013

Time: 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Host: Small Business Administration

**Attendees**

Lakisa Carter, Department of Labor

Brian Clapp, Environmental Protection Agency

Becky Cool, Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics

Ivonne Cunarro, Department of Commerce, Minority Business Development Agency

Pam Frugoli, Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration

Pam Gerassmides, National Association of State Workforce Agencies

Joan Grey, Business and Professional Women’s Foundation

Tim Griffith, National Association of State Workforce Agencies

Jacqueline Haynes, Department of Veterans Affairs, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment

Lorenzo C. Hobbs, Department of Veterans Affairs, Direct Connect Program

David Hughes, Appalachian Regional Commission

Pam Hurt, Society of Manufacturing Engineers

Rhett Jeppson, Small Business Administration

Michele S. Jones, Office of Personnel Management

Rachel Karton, Small Business Administration, Office of Small Business Development Centers

Lauren Leonard, Department of Labor

Paul Matthai, Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics

Brian McDonald, Small Business Administration

Angel Menendez, Department of Labor

Tanya Mottley, Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics

Tom Murray, Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics / Green Suppliers Network

Ann Ngo, Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration

Wilson Paine, Appalachian Regional Commission

Andrew Ridgeway, Department of Labor, Office of Workforce Investment

Steve Shapiro, Department of Commerce

Heidi Sheppard, Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Carroll Thomas, Small Business Administration

Kevin Thompson, Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration

Tom Tillman, Environmental Protection Agency

Stacey Wagner, Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Kevin Watson, National Aeronautics and Space Administration

David Widawsky, Environmental Protection Agency

Angela Wilcher, Department of Veterans Affairs

Jen Worth, American Association of Community Colleges

**Attendees on the Phone**

Joel Delofsky, Department of Labor

John Smeigal, Department of Energy

Ben Vickery, Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Manufacturing Extension Partnership / Environmental Protection Agency

**Meeting Location**

Environmental Protection Agency

1201 Constitution Ave., NW

Washington, DC 20460

**Time and Date**

2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m., November 28, 2012

**Assisted by**

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