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Assessment of the Workforce System's Implementation of the Veterans' Priority of Service Provision of the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002

Final Report

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I. INTRODUCTION

Caring for veterans has become an increasingly important policy focus in recent years as the number of service members returning from Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) has increased. A number of actions have assisted veterans in obtaining civilian employment or returning to school. Examples include employer incentives, such as the Returning Heroes and Wounded Warrior tax credits, and educational funding through the Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Improvement Act of 2010 and the Yellow Ribbon Program. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) places special emphasis on serving veterans through numerous programs and offices. One of the ways in which DOL does this is by providing priority of service (POS) to veterans and eligible spouses in the receipt of employment, training, and placement services. POS has a long history, reaching back to the establishment of a national system of publicly funded Employment Service offices under the Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933. More recently, POS was included as a provision of the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002 (JVA).

Although the JVA took effect a decade ago, guidance to the workforce investment system on implementing POS was limited until recent years when, in November 2009 and again in November 2010, the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) and the Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) issued concurrent guidance providing comprehensive direction for implementing POS[1]. Sufficient time has now passed since the JVA took effect and state and local workforce agencies received implementation guidance to create and modify programs, hire and train necessary staff, and learn from their initial efforts.

Studies conducted before or shortly after the issuance of guidance on the implementation of POS found a wide range of strategies in place to provide POS: from simply holding job orders for 24 hours while determining if an eligible veteran was qualified for the position to programs engaging a number of strategies to alter and supplement a veteran's experience; in some cases, special funds provided more intensive services and training for veterans (Barnow and Trutko 2010; Mikelson et al. 2004). These early studies also suggested methods to improve accountability and help states implement the JVA reforms (Barnow and Trutko 2010; Government Accountability Office 2005).

In July 2011, ETA contracted with Mathematica Policy Research to conduct an assessment of the Workforce System's Implementation of the Priority of Service Provision of the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002 to examine the status of current POS implementation efforts. This report provides a detailed description of the activities and practices of a select set of American Job Centers (AJCs), documents promising practices in place at these AJCs, and identifies challenges to POS implementation that further guidance should address. Specific areas of interest in this study include (1) how veterans and eligible spouses are identified for POS, (2) POS procedures after veterans and eligible spouses are identified, and (3) service provision under POS. This study is based on site visits and telephone discussions with AJC staff, discussions with veterans' service organization (VSO) representatives, and focus groups with veterans and eligible spouses.

[1] Appendix A provides a legislative history and literature review for the POS provision of the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002.

Chapter II of this report summarizes findings from the discussions and focus groups, Chapter III describes challenges and promising practices in POS implementation across sites, and Chapter IV identifies recommendations for POS improvements and next steps. Specific questions and probes were developed into separate semistructured site visit discussion guides tailored to each of these three respondent groups. These research questions and discussion guides are presented in Appendices B and C.

This assessment included seven states—Alaska, California, Florida, Kansas, New Jersey, Ohio, and Virginia.[2] These states cover a range of geographic, demographic, economic, veterans', and other characteristics relevant to the research questions. Study team members visited sites in all but two states in person; we spoke with AJC staff in Alaska and Kansas by telephone. Two study team members visited the sites in Virginia and New Jersey in order to conduct focus groups with veterans and eligible spouses there in addition to the guided discussions with AJC staff. A single study team member visited the remaining three states. These conversations with sites took place in spring and summer 2012. Table I.1 summarizes the participation of the various sites and Appendices D through J provide detailed descriptions of each site visit.

Through speaking with multiple stakeholders, we obtained different perspectives on how POS is being implemented, the quality of services, and whether the needs of veterans and their spouses are being met. We held semistructured discussions with key AJC staff, such as managers, intake workers, case managers, and those who provide orientation to the available services; Workforce Investment Board (WIB) representatives; state veterans' coordinators, veterans' representatives[3], veterans, and eligible spouses; and VSO representatives, with the exact mix of respondents varying based on the site's structure, staff tenure, employee availability, and other factors. Study findings and recommendations are based on information and perceptions provided by a convenience sampling of respondents across the seven sites; findings may not be representative more broadly.

Table I.1. Summary of Participation, by Site

State	LWIA	AJC Contacted	Mode of Contact	Focus Group
Alaska	Entire state	Anchorage Midtown	Telephone—February/ March 2012	No
California	Golden Sierra	Auburn and Roseville	In person—June 2012	No
Florida	Region 8	Jacksonville and Fleming Island	In person—May 2012	No
Kansas	Area II	Junction City	Telephone—February 2012	No
New Jersey	Newark	Newark	In person—May 2012	Yes
Ohio	Lucas County, Area 9	Toledo	In person—April 2012	No
Virginia	Hampton Roads	Norfolk	In person—May 2012	Yes

AJC = American Job Center; LWIA = local workforce investment area.

[2] These are the same seven states included in the Barnow and Trutko study that was underway at the time the final rule was issued. To the extent possible we interviewed respondents in the same AJCs in those states.

[3] Throughout this report, Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff and Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists are frequently referred to as veterans' representatives to protect the confidentiality of individual respondents.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A. Awareness and Usefulness of Federal Guidance

The final rule regulating the Priority of Service Provision of the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002 was published in the December 19, 2008, *Federal Register*. TEGL 10-09 (Training and Employment Guidance Letter) and VPL 07-09 (Veteran Program Letter), corresponding guidances published by ETA and VETS, respectively, were published in September 2009 and ETA issued Training and Employment Notice (TEN) 15-10 in November 2010. These guidances provide information on how to apply POS and determine who is eligible to receive it. The federal guidances are available to staff in all of the study states. Across all sites, familiarity with the federally issued guidances tends to vary with position. County and WIB representatives, AJC managers, and state veteran coordinators—essentially those in higher-level, supervisory positions—tend to be familiar with the guidances as issued in their original forms. They have read the guidance and have often interpreted it for others or have used it to develop materials on POS for use by others. Line staff are aware that federal guidance exists, but it is not something to which they regularly refer or their primary resource. Although it was usually provided to them during their initial training when they were hired or in a job manual, line staff are more likely to consult materials created at the state or local levels or to ask colleagues when they have questions about POS.

Those familiar with the federal guidances (most often TEGL 10-09 and/or VPL 07-09) often describe them as difficult to understand and written in "legalese." They say one cannot simply turn to it and find an answer to a question. One must spend a lot of time reading through the whole document, combing it for the necessary details, and then interpreting them and coming to a judgment about the right course of action. Because interpretations might vary, this often becomes a group exercise. As these staff are generally quite busy, they frequently do not feel they have time to read the numerous guidances issued that relate to their jobs, much less reread and ponder older guidances when unusual situations arise.

Even among those familiar with TEGL 10-09 and/or VPL 07-09, staff at all levels had little familiarity with TEN 15-10. This is unfortunate because TEN 15-10 incorporates the straightforward language, clear direction on what to do and how to go about it, and ease of use frequently described by staff as the desired alternative to the federal guidances with which they are familiar. The cause of this lack of familiarity with TEN 15-10 is unclear. It might be that less attention was paid to it because other federal guidances had previously been issued or perhaps because state- and local-level guidance had already been created by the time the TEN was issued.

Some staff rely more on state or locally developed guidance on POS than on the federal guidances. Where it exists, the state or locally developed guidance tends to include more direct language and specifics about the expectations of staff than the federal guidances contain. State and local versions often quote sections of the federal guidance and then expound on it and clarify the meaning. Another popular approach is to explicitly detail what POS is and how AJCs should carry it out, with references to the federal documents supplied at the end. Sometimes a question-and-answer section is included. In one state, the state guidance is a verbatim copy of the federal guidance, reformatted to fit the state standard. The guidance in some states takes a tone similar to that of the federal guidance, whereas in other states it is less formal.

Dissemination of guidance to staff occurs in a variety of ways and at various points in time. Both federal and subfederal guidance are usually provided in training materials used with new hires; the guidances are also maintained in online or physical repositories for access at any time. Training sessions on POS that take place as part of routine staff training use state or locally generated guidance more often than the federal guidance. Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff and Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists also learn about POS when they attend training at the National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI) and they frequently present what they have learned to other staff members at the AJC upon their return.

Veterans' program managers educate both veterans' representatives and other staff on POS, procedures for serving veterans, and related matters. Some of the AJCs visited are served by strong veterans' program managers who regularly visit, look for holes in staff knowledge or implementation, provide additional information or training so any issues can be remedied, and create cohesion between the veterans' representatives and other staff. However, staff at other sites did not mention anyone in such a role or did not place much emphasis on the activities of the individual in that role. AJCs that described a strong veterans' program management presence seemed to value it highly.

Though line staff are not always intimately familiar with the federal guidance, it has been useful in several ways. First, the guidance provided the direction behind the changes made in the AJCs to implement or deepen provision of POS. It also allowed for creation of state- and local-level guidance that has been more frequently and intensively used and disseminated across sites. The less familiar TEN is written in a style and tone described as optimal by a range of respondents; thus, broader dissemination of it would make it highly effective. The desk aid provided to and regularly referenced by Kansas staff and Ohio's online collection of regulations and forms are examples of what some states do to ensure that staff have ready access to all the information they need to serve customers effectively and correctly.

B. Implementation of Priority of Service

POS implementation in AJCs has a number of facets, which means any particular site can resemble others in some ways but differ in others. This section discusses various aspects of implementing POS, including generating awareness, identifying and registering eligible customers, and providing services. It also discusses the computer systems used both by staff and customers, the role those systems play in the provision of POS, and how sites monitor POS. For the sake of brevity and clarity, eligible spouses are included in all discussions of POS eligibles, even if not explicitly mentioned.

1. Awareness of POS Among Veterans and Eligible Spouses

Across sites, awareness of POS among first-time customers who are eligible for it is relatively low. Recently separated veterans, particularly those who have been through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), are more likely to be aware of POS before contacting the AJC than are those who separated long ago or who did not go through TAP. Veterans also have sometimes gained awareness through reading about POS online while seeking information on employment, educational opportunities, or veterans' benefits.

POS is generally described to veterans and eligible spouses as giving them first access to job postings and priority placement in workshops and trainings if a civilian and a veteran otherwise meet all the same criteria for those services. Several states have posters, flyers, or handouts about what POS is; who is eligible; and how it is applied, posted, or otherwise made available in public areas of the AJC. Eligibility descriptions are also found on paperwork and in packets received by new customers. This serves the multiple purposes of informing customers, reminding staff of the details, and keeping POS at the forefront of the minds of staff. Because of the multiple modes of communication and reinforcement, veterans quickly become aware of POS and those who return to an AJC will often go directly to the resources that they know are set aside for them.

Veterans' referrals to the AJC occur through a variety of channels. Referrals come from public and private agencies, military bases, TAP, radio advertisements, emails, and word of mouth. All of the sites conducted outreach specifically targeted to veterans that was beyond the scope of outreach directed toward civilians. Each site holds and participates in veterans' job fairs and conducts outreach at places such as VSOs, homeless and emergency shelters, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) clinics, assistance organizations, schools, chambers of commerce, and employers. In many states, veterans' representative staff work with those from the job development side of the AJC to identify veteran-friendly employers or to show employers the advantages of hiring veterans. The veterans' representatives may also conduct ongoing work with soldiers and staff in the Warrior Transition Battalions, in the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service (VR&E), and at homeless and emergency shelters and other programs; they also participate in stand-downs and seek veterans when their rapid-response teams are deployed to deal with a layoff.

Some veterans' representatives conduct their work from a single AJC, whereas others serve multiple sites. They may spend part of their time at other AJCs that do not have their own veterans' representatives, where they serve the dual purpose of meeting with veterans and educating other staff members about POS and serving veterans. Some veterans' representatives are out-stationed on a military base, at a school, or on some other premises where there is a significant population of veterans to serve. This kind of outreach removes the initial onus from veterans to visit an AJC and allows the initial contact to be in territory that is familiar and convenient to the veteran. Veterans' representatives conduct further ongoing outreach by sending daily job listings to interested groups.

2. POS Identification and Intake Procedures

Every customer, whether visiting an AJC in person or online, must be identified as eligible for POS. This takes place through a variety of means and at different times, though there are some consistent practices across sites. Through attempts to identify eligible customers, many nonveteran customers become aware of the existence of POS, which could be beneficial should they share the information with an eligible friend or relative.

In many sites at least some respondents, notably veterans' representatives, thought that the 180-day service definition applied for POS eligibility. In one site this view was widespread. However, all such respondents indicated they served veterans with priority regardless of length of service. Because veterans' representatives only serve veterans, they may be less focused on POS-specific criteria compared to program-specific veterans' criteria.

Most sites inquire about veterans' status both verbally and by means of a sign-in sheet when customers arrive at an AJC. Methods for identifying veterans are almost universally more robust than those for identifying eligible spouses. Almost all of the states in the study have an effective means of identifying eligible spouses, though the methods vary. Several states include each of the four questions needed to determine spousal eligibility in their online registration, which may be completed in person or remotely. A few include these questions in paper forms that are completed during in person registration. Several also post the eligibility rules in the greeting area so customers will see them. Other states do not take steps to identify eligible spouses or simply ask if an individual is one, without providing a definition.

Sites typically ask customers about their reasons for visiting the AJC. In some states, veterans are directed toward the resource room or other services in the same manner as nonveterans and see a veterans' representative only if they request to or have a clear need. Other states attempt to introduce each veteran entering the AJC to a veterans' representative, either to increase the feeling of welcome or to make clear the availability of this resource. In still others, the introduction enables the veterans' representative to have a conversation with the customer and try to identify any barriers to employment that the customer might not recognize or realize he or she can get assistance with at the AJC. The customer may then begin receiving case management by a veterans' representative. Some sites, such as Newark, have a high customer load and limited staff and funding to serve them, so veterans seeing a veterans' representative are essentially the only non-Workforce Investment Act (WIA) customers who receive case management.

In most states, when veterans are identified at reception, greeters report thanking the person for his or her service; the greeter then explains POS and describes how the AJC works; all new customers receive this information. Veterans on return visits to the AJC therefore already know about POS and the resources available to them and often go directly to the veterans' computers or ask to speak with someone. Veterans' representatives at a few of the sites generate reports that show veterans who have registered online but have not visited an AJC. If the veteran lives in the area, the representative calls, emails, or sends a letter providing an overview of POS and the services available in the AJC and inviting the veteran to visit. If the contact is by telephone, the veterans' representative making the call will have the veteran's record open and will try to obtain and record as much of the information necessary for determining POS and other service eligibility as possible.

All sites reported taking veterans and eligible spouses at their word about their status and providing POS on that basis. Veterans are not required to show a DD-214[4] or other proof of status until they attempt to enroll in some kind of funded activity, such as training. Veterans' representatives or other staff at all sites regularly assist veterans with obtaining replacement DD-214s. Veterans' representatives in at least two study sites help veterans clear blemishes on their DD-214s.

[4] DD Form 214 is officially called a Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty. It is issued by the Department of Defense and serves as a complete record of a service member's time in the military, trainings and schools completed, MOS, awards, promotions, deployments, separation codes, and reenlistment eligibility codes.

3. POS Provision

Most sites had computers set aside for use by veterans. This enables veterans to have prompt access to a computer for job search or resume development without waiting in line. These computers often are segregated from the other workstations and in a quieter area closer to staff desks. In some sites, this appears to have been a conscious decision to provide a quieter, less populated area that could be more comfortable for someone with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); in other cases, it might have been more a matter of available space. Several sites mentioned that if the veterans' and public computers are full, veterans can use computers in vacant training rooms. Several sites also mentioned that because the veterans' computers are closer to staff desks, staff members often assist the veterans when they have a question or issue. Therefore, these veterans get quicker and greater assistance than users of the computers in the main room, where only a few staff members are available to assist many customers.

These dedicated computers are often in an area of the AJC set aside for veterans. These areas tend to include books on topics such as transitioning from the military to civilian employment, writing civilian resumes, and translating military skills to civilian terms. They also tend to feature information on medical, educational, and other benefits and resources available from other organizations. Some even have materials not directly related to finding employment but critically important to veterans, such as military-oriented Alcoholics Anonymous brochures.

Veterans who engage in more than self-service activities follow much the same flow as other customers. A Wagner-Peyser staff member or a veterans' representative can serve them, or the veteran may also have a WIA counselor. These staff members share responsibility for the individual customer and work together. In some sites, these staff members are highly integrated and have informal conversations about their shared customers to exchange information on their most recent contacts and plan next steps. They may also refer veterans to an array of additional services, either in or outside of the AJC. They try to make sure the individual is eligible before making the referral, but the receiving program ultimately determines eligibility.

Veterans who are case managed by veterans' representatives at most sites receive by email job postings that the representative thinks will suit them, often before nonveteran customers see the postings. Newark uses an interactive voice response (IVR) system to notify veterans of job postings that match their skills and interests. Email and IVR alerts are in addition to the veterans being able to search job postings for a period before the postings are available to the broader public. In many sites, there are special workshops and sessions for veterans and they are eligible for and referred to numerous additional programs.

All sites offer a selection of workshops and other on-site training opportunities. Demand for these workshops varies, as does the space available. Some sites have several large training rooms and have not faced situations in which demand for a session exceeded their ability to accommodate customers. Most sites can move a filled class to a larger room or add chairs. Because some sites without space constraints can serve all customers, veterans' status is not a concern at sign-up. These sites report documented plans for how to give veterans priority should there ever be inadequate space available. Sites with constrained training space note veterans' status at registration to ensure that they receive priority.

Some sites reserve a certain number of spaces for veterans, but fill those spaces with nonveterans only if they are still empty at the beginning of the session. Others have people sign

up for a session, prioritize veterans over nonveterans in allocating seats, and then announce who may attend the session. If there is a waiting list, the site places any additional veterans at the top, followed by nonveterans. When there is such high demand, some sites add another session as soon as possible, sometimes even running it concurrently with the original session but in another room. No site reported that it would bump a nonveteran who it told had a slot in a session in favor of a veteran who requested the session later. All said they would find another way to accommodate the veteran.

Websites in use at some sites enable veterans to submit questions that are answered in real time. Many customers expect this kind of interaction and immediate response, especially younger people accustomed to electronic communication. Having such exchanges be publicly visible to the extent possible allows the exchanges to be searchable, so others with similar questions can find answers without asking.

One site uses the NVTI DVOP specialist locator to help connect relocating customers with a DVOP specialist in the new area before the move. It requires relatively little effort and quick activity for the staff member, but makes resuming service receipt after moving considerably easier for the veteran.

4. Computer Systems

Two companies, Geographic Solutions and America's Job Link Alliance (AJLA), and a consortium, America's One-Stop Operating System (OSOS), are responsible for creating and/or maintaining many of the systems used by state workforce agencies for customer record-keeping, job matching, creating reports, resume generation, and other requirements. The systems in various states are therefore relatively similar in their functionality, use consistent terminology, and employ familiar navigation techniques. They are updated as needed to comply with changes to Common Measures reporting requirements. Of the participants in this study, Alaska, California (both the California Workforce Services Network and the Golden Sierra WIB), Virginia (both the Virginia Employment Commission and the Hampton Roads Workforce Board), and Florida (the statewide Employ Florida Marketplace only) used Geographic Solutions; Kansas used AJLA; New Jersey used OSOS, and Ohio used its own system.

The sites vary according to the features and functions they had purchased, the questions presented to customers at registration, additional information they ask customers to fill in, the rules defining staff members who may access particular customers' records and components of the overall system, and other areas. One of the key ways this variability surfaces in POS for veterans is the questions presented at registration. One system simply asks, "Are you a veteran?" Another asks that plus, "Are you an eligible spouse?" without defining the term or clarifying the purpose of the eligibility. Still other systems gather relatively detailed information on veterans' status and type and year of discharge for veterans, and ask each of the four questions that determine eligible spouse status. When registered, there is a page on which customers fill out additional information about themselves (some sites can use this information to automatically generate a basic resume), but not all customers find or complete this page.

Those who identify as veterans or eligible spouses are recorded as such in the system and will receive any emails directed to all veterans. Any lack of specificity may cause confusion for those who come to the AJC and meet with a staff member, however.

Across sites that do not initially ask detailed questions to determine eligible spouse status, staff noted that most customers who identify themselves as such are unfamiliar with POS and do not know that the eligibility refers to it. They choose it as the spouse or widow of a veteran or service member. When such customers meet with a staff member who reviews their registration information to get to know them and their needs, it often becomes clear that the spouse who is in the military is alive, well, and present, and that the individual therefore does not meet the POS eligibility requirements. Staff report that customers often are upset and feel they are being denied an earned benefit when they learn they are not an eligible spouse after having identified as such. Staff report handling this by either explaining what an eligible spouse is or by showing the person the criteria. Some customers are then relieved to be ineligible, but others remain upset and the interaction has a negative shadow. Websites that ask highly specific questions to determine eligible spouse status as part of the initial registration avoid this issue.

Customers and staff members with whom customers work enter information about the customer beyond that collected at registration into the computer system. Generally, this includes various pieces of demographic and contact information as well as educational and employment history. For veterans, this involves additional information on their service, such as type and date of discharge, service dates, service-connected disability status, and if the rating is above or below 30 percent. Additional details, such as military occupational specialty (MOS) and military training courses completed are likely to be discussed during the resume-creation process.

Much of this information is then searchable by staff members. They may pull the records of all recently discharged veterans or those with a service-connected disability in order to send emails inviting them to an upcoming seminar geared toward such veterans. They may also search for individuals who match criteria for a particular job posting and then forward that posting to them. The veterans' representatives usually conduct these targeted searches; this is a service not generally conducted on behalf of other AJC customers.

In addition to being identifiable to staff as veterans, many of the computer systems in use identify veterans to employers by putting an icon next to their names. In some systems, records for veterans appear at the top of the employers' search results. The system at one site allows employers to search specifically for veterans. Staff at several sites were unsure if their systems provided this service to employers, but they generally liked the idea.

Staff record all services they provide to each individual in the customer's record in their state's computer system. This serves multiple purposes. It enables multiple staff members in the same or different AJCs to serve a particular customer, as they can see services already provided to and workshops attended by the customer. There is some variation across sites in what staff can see in terms of a list of services provided, or case notes of other types of staff members. The state systems also provide a rich source of data for monitoring.

5. Monitoring POS

Data that enable sites to monitor the status and progress of their POS customers are pulled from state computer systems at various intervals, ranging from weekly and monthly to annually. Likewise, a varying range of individuals, from local staff to federal officials, review these records. At the local level, the systems generate reports to monitor the activities of individual staff members, track the number and types of customers who receive various services and who enter and successfully complete different programs, and monitor budgets. Feedback can be given

to staff who do not record information about their interactions with customers correctly. Those who have particularly high placement rates might be asked about strategies and practices they employ, and spending can be monitored to determine how many more customers can enroll in a program.

Regional and state veterans' program coordinators monitor veterans' entered employment, retention, and average earnings performance measures at the local level. They also monitor the activities of their staffs, trends in customer types and interests, and other figures that could lead them to change or improve offerings. Some individuals in these roles take special interest in the available data and run ad hoc reports with some regularity to see if the data reflect trends they have noticed and if they should apply emphasis or resources to a particular area.

State computer systems also generate common measures and other reports required at the state and federal levels. These can be preprogrammed to run automatically on a regular basis. At the state level, these reports are used to monitor the effectiveness of local workforce investment areas (LWIAs), compare AJCs and regions in the state, and compare the state as a whole to the published outcomes of other states. Most staff members seem to be primarily interested in these standard reports. Some AJCs also track veterans' POS and services outside their central workforce systems on Excel spreadsheets.

C. Translation of Military Experience and Skills

Across sites, staff reported a high degree of confidence in the ability of some or all staff members to translate military skills and experience into civilian terms. Approaches showed considerable overlap, but the emphasis varied by site largely based on the background of the staff. In some sites, the staff were primarily from civilian backgrounds and tended to use online translation resources such as O*NET, Military.com (the military side of Monster.com), and MyNextMove.org/vets for assistance. In sites where a predominance of the staff have military backgrounds, the tendency is more toward relying on personal knowledge. When these staff members were unsure about the duties of a particular military job, that job was generally one from a different service branch that entailed a set of duties or branch-specific vocabulary with which the individual was unfamiliar. Some of the staff members who are veterans described having enjoyed schooling each other in cross-branch vocabulary over the years and some civilian staff said they have enjoyed learning about the military. Sites with a primarily civilian staff, but with a strong contingent of veterans, rely on a mix of experience and online resources and civilian staff frequently mention asking staff members who are veterans for assistance.

Although staff typically use O*NET because of their familiarity with it from the use of its codes on job postings and desired occupations, some criticize it as being very basic, overly general, and not particularly useful when working with clients. Some staff cited Military.com as an example of a preferred skill translation and job search website. They prefer it because the site not only allows the submission of an MOS or job title, but also pay grade, subspecialties, collateral duties, and specialized trainings and schools attended. The system then returns a list of civilian skills the individual is likely to have and job listings that might be appropriate for the customer and that take advantage of those skills. The customer can select and deselect skills to more closely approximate his or her set, thereby altering the jobs shown. This system allows for a considerably more nuanced evaluation of the individual's role in the military, level of experience, and transferable skills. It generates more than one job title in cases in which the actual duties of the job may fall into several civilian categories. Finally, Military.com generates

actual job postings, whereas O*NET stops at generating a job title, which must then be used in a different system to find job postings.

Some staff, both those who are well versed in military terminology and those who are not, described asking many questions and requiring veterans to find ways to explain their military activities in ways that civilians can understand. This serves the multiple purposes of translating the activities for use in the resume, requiring the veteran to think of his or her activities in civilian terms, and providing the veteran practice in describing experience in terms that would likely be necessary during an interview. All kinds of staff assist in resume development for veterans, and therefore this kind of translation, but when veterans have particular difficulty in this area or have worked in areas that are complicated to relate to the civilian world, they seem likely to receive assistance from and the expertise of a veterans' representative, across sites. In several sites, information from Business Services staff or directly from employers on the needs and desires of the employers is used to advise veterans and other customers. They are also advised of key words and phrases that employers and search engines are likely to seek.

Staff help veterans understand the types and amount of information to include on their resumes. For example, although awards and commendations are a standard part of what a promotion review board would examine, they may be less appropriate on a civilian resume. Staff might advise a young veteran to include mention of a good conduct award, because an employer would understand this and view it as a desirable trait. Conversely, staff would advise against including a long list of commendations or those that might be difficult for a civilian employer to understand or readily apply to the positions for which the veteran is hiring and instead focus on transferable skills.

In addition to assistance from staff, all sites had resources veterans could use independently to assist with translating their military skills and experience when developing resumes or preparing for interviews. These resources include books specifically on the topic, photocopied materials, lists of external websites, and links to state or local websites.

III. CHALLENGES AND PROMISING PRACTICES IN IMPLEMENTING POS

A. Common Challenges and Misunderstandings in Implementing POS

In most sites, respondents did not report any difficulties in understanding the intent of POS or in providing it to veterans. However, respondents commonly noted that the definition of *covered spouse* is challenging to understand and apply. The sites that have difficulty applying it tend to take the approach of asking customers, either verbally or on an information sheet, if they are eligible spouses. Individuals generally do not know what that is, frequently assuming it to mean "spouse of a service member or veteran," often leading to inaccurate answers and requiring conversations to clarify the term's meaning. For the most part, those who identified as eligible spouses turn out to not be and often feel that something to which they are entitled is being taken away when they are told they are not an eligible spouse. When the individual is truly an eligible spouse, these conversations can be emotional and awkward due to the nature of the eligibility requirements.

The sites that have not encountered difficulties with implementing POS with eligible spouses are those that list each of the eligibility requirements as yes/no questions. This approach prevents misclassification and avoids having to tell individuals that they are not eligible for something that they had come to believe, for however short a time, they were. A related issue is that some sites ask only about military spouses. It is important to identify these individuals to ensure they receive the additional services that are often available to them. POS-eligible spouses are only a small subset of military spouses, however, and identification as a military spouse does not help determine eligibility for POS.

In many sites, at least some respondents thought that the 180-day service definition applied for veteran eligibility for POS and in one site this view was widespread. This presents a challenge to implementation especially when the wrong service definition is applied in the intake and initial registration procedures, and when the veterans' representatives at a site used the wrong service definition for POS and provided guidance to other staff.

Sites understand that all staff members can serve veterans and only one site automatically directed all veterans to veterans' representatives. Most sites tell veterans about the existence of veterans' representatives when discussing the services available at the AJC and some sites make an effort to introduce all veterans to a veterans' representative. A few sites actively try to identify barriers to employment that would make veterans eligible to receive services from a DVOP specialist. In one of these sites, those customers seen by the DVOP specialist are effectively the only non-WIA customers who receive case management services due to the customer flow and staffing resources.

Many sites report confusion among veterans about the various providers that offer employment, training, and other workforce services for veterans. Both staff members and focus group participants mentioned the growing number of organizations that provide similar services and the difficulty some veterans have in drawing distinctions among some of the providers and offerings. Distinctions among offerings provided by DOL, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), and VA are often unclear. These providers, as well as VSOs and other organizations, provide similar and somewhat overlapping services, sometimes in shared locations. Veterans often do not know which agency administered the program they dealt with or that there are

multiple service providers, potentially with different offerings and eligibility requirements. Therefore, veterans sometimes think they have exhausted their employment and training options when they may only have scratched the surface.

Sites report that some veterans believe that POS or veterans' preference means that the AJC will find them a job and will do so before placing nonveterans. Several focus group participants indicated they would like this to be the case. AJC staff said that this misunderstanding can usually be resolved by explaining that AJCs assist individuals in finding jobs but cannot simply tell an employer that they must hire an individual or slot a customer into a position by some other means, and by explaining what POS and the veterans' preference in federal hiring are and how they work. Similarly, a few veterans believe that they are being denied POS when they are placed on a waiting list for training when funds are limited.

B. Promising Practices in POS Implementation

Sites had many similarities in their practices but also wide variations. These differences provide promising practices that can improve services at other sites. The promising practices listed here were in use at one or more of the sites in the study. They seemed to contribute positively to the operations there and be preferable to the practices in place at other sites or those previously in place. The promising practices were either mentioned by a staff member or focus group participant or noticed by the site visitor. Interestingly, not all of these practices were ones that staff members were most interested in communicating to the site visitors. Some were practices they thought were unremarkable and that came up only through probing. Such promising practices include the following:

- Posting signage in publicly accessible, highly trafficked areas informs customers about the existence and details of POS, the eligibility requirements, and the need to identify as a veteran or eligible spouse. A combination of types of signs is highly effective—a sign on the door simply announcing that veterans receive POS along with a flyer by the sign-in sheet explaining the eligibility criteria and additional signs and posters around the entrance area and resource room increases everyone's awareness and provides additional information to those to whom it applies.
- Inclusion of direct questions tied to each eligibility criterion helps to determine eligibility during registration in both paper and electronic registration materials. Sites that included direct yes/no questions to determine eligibility avoided considerable confusion and customer distress and were more likely to identify any eligible spouses who came in than were sites that did not ask direct questions.
- Customers noted the helpfulness of designated veterans' computers and areas in a calm environment with ready access to staff for assistance. This was common across sites and mentioned frequently by veterans in the focus groups as being particularly helpful and making visits to the AJC more enjoyable. Having access to dedicated computers and being able to bypass the line for the main resource room computers was often the first response when veterans were asked how they thought they were given POS.
- Public outreach through television, radio, social media sites, and community organizations increased awareness of POS and the activities of the AJC among both veterans and other groups likely to interact with veterans. Sites conduct this kind of

outreach to varying degrees. In Alaska, where radio is key to local communication, several AJC managers have weekly radio spots to announce events and provide information to the public on topics such as POS. Representatives from Florida's region 8 have gone on local television to provide information and answer questions from callers. In a section of one AJC's website, veterans can submit questions and receive immediate answers. Several AJCs have Facebook and Twitter accounts for disseminating information and increasing awareness. These efforts help to reach those who are unaware of AJCs and POS, those who have given up on job search or who do not know where to begin, and those who know individuals who would benefit from the services of the AJC.

- Highly engaged and well-informed state or regional veterans' program representatives provide information on POS and serving veterans to other staff. Staff at several sites spoke enthusiastically of these representatives and the impact they had on staff knowledge, procedures, and the development of an orientation toward veterans. These staff members tend to review data to refine procedures, develop innovative practices, and create materials as needed to train staff or provide information to veterans. In other study sites, these staff members seemed to have less influence and were mentioned little, if at all, by staff members.

- Staff noted the efficacy of using paper compendiums or electronically accessible repositories of guidance and training materials and forms on POS, serving veterans, and AJC operations for reference and use by staff and for printing and distribution to customers. Having easily accessible documentation and materials increases the likelihood that customers read and use them.

- Frequent all-staff meetings and strong connections between different types of staff allow for informal knowledge sharing and a less-siloed atmosphere. Staff at sites that have such meetings repeatedly mentioned the meetings as a contributing factor to the positive relationship between veterans' representatives and other staff members and the willingness of the two groups to seek assistance and guidance from each other. The information shared in the meetings also increases knowledge across staff members of POS, eligibility criteria, and the various programs and resources available at the site.

- Coordinated wrap-around services from multiple providers can holistically address the needs of an individual and, potentially, those of a whole family. Some sites have several partner agencies collocated with them to make use of referrals by customers easier. Other sites prefer to be independently located in order to keep the focus on employment and education. To some extent, this preference seems to depend on external factors, such as the configuration of the physical space and availability of local transportation. Beyond this kind of referral and collocation, Alaska is targeting disabled veterans for wraparound services. The AJC staff meet with the veteran, and his or her family if appropriate, to determine the veteran's needs. Then the appropriate agencies, including those outside the usual partners, meet to develop a service plan and work out all of the details. This takes the burden off the veteran and allows for the most efficient and coordinated service provision possible.

- Some sites displayed strong connections to VSOs for outreach and cross-referrals. Veterans' representatives from many sites give presentations at meetings of groups such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, churches, and others that come into contact

with veterans. This educates those groups on POS and what is available in an AJC so they may refer veterans to such services. It also familiarizes the veterans' representative, who then passes the information to the other staff members, of programs those organizations have available to which the AJC may see fit to refer its customers.

- Grouping veterans for seminars, workshops, and networking helps them to share experiences and have peers to whom they can relate. California's Vet Net program forms cohorts of veterans who move together through an eight-week program of seminars, workshops, mock interviews with actual employers, and other activities. They critique one another's resumes and interviewing skills, give one another advice, and form support networks. These customers have a common set of experiences that differentiates them from other customers at the AJC and may make them better able to relate to other veterans than to some of the other customers. Both the site staff and the veterans speak highly of the program. Customers felt the limitation to veterans and the focus on confidentiality were important because it enabled them to openly discuss their challenges with others who would understand and be able to give suggestions.
- Stand-alone veterans' workforce centers, such as those set up in response to base closures or restructuring, have helped some sites provide services to veterans. These centers are usually set up on a temporary basis to deal with a particular event, such as when the Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) was decommissioned in Virginia and a satellite site was set up there to serve those impacted by the closure, and when BRAC relocations sent many new families to Florida and the family members needed assistance in finding employment in their new home. These sites are able to suit the particular set of needs of the more homogeneous group of customers they see, running workshops and providing handouts tailored to them. These centers are often set up on base, a place to which all of the customers already have access and transportation.
- Wallet cards provided to veterans show activities that have to be done and document those already completed. This is unique to Virginia and has proven to be a successful means of reminding customers to bring necessary materials and keep on track with workshop attendance.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Topics for Further Guidance

Staff frequently described the federal guidance as difficult to understand and intimidating, and some feel that it requires interpretation. They would prefer it be written in more common language with footnotes or endnotes listing the various legislation and other documents referred to in the text and defining special terms. They also suggested that clear instruction on how to implement the guidance—such as "Ask this series of questions to determine if an individual is an eligible spouse …"—would be helpful. In many ways, what they requested was similar to TEN 15-10, with which most staff were not familiar, so DOL should consider more proactive steps to increase awareness of this document.

There is some confusion about the appropriate service definition to use for veteran eligibility for POS, although the definition of an eligible spouse is not as widely understood as is that of a veteran for the purpose of POS. The existing guidances clearly explain the criteria, but because these criteria are relatively detailed and there are several ways in which a person can become eligible, they might be difficult for some staff members to remember. Additionally, the infrequency of encountering an eligible spouse and the nature of the events that create eligibility can disincline staff to ask about it. For these reasons, guidance on how to implement identification would be useful. Key to this would be including each of the four causes of eligibility as yes/no questions in all materials a customer could use to register with the workforce system (online, paper-based, and so on), rather than asking if an individual is an eligible spouse. Additionally, sample posters about POS that show in clear language who is eligible could be included, as could posters identifying military spouses and eligible spouses and the services available to each group.

Some sites encountered confusion about the eligibility of National Guard and Reserve members for POS; this could be considered as a topic for further guidance. This topic is addressed well in TEGL 10-09 and VPL 07-09, but is not explained in detail in TEN 15-10. TEN 15-10 does address the different veteran eligibility definitions across POS, Wagner-Peyser and other programs.

B. Dissemination of Guidance

Staff of sites in multiple states requested additional training on the intricacies of implementing POS. They suggested several forms this training could take. One was in-person training conducted once or twice a year by federal or other experts who could answer detailed questions about how exactly to implement the guidance and who could provide intensive training, retraining, and technical assistance on implementation challenges encountered during the year. Some staff pointed out that this approach would offer ETA the opportunity to assess implementation progress on a regular basis and provide direct feedback to the AJCs.

Recognizing the cost implications of this approach, sites suggested alternative interactive approaches to training and technical assistance. These could be point-in-time events, such as webinars and video conferences, or ongoing activities, such as a website or blog. A website or blog would enable staff to ask questions and receive expert advice in real time and view questions and answers asked by others. Webinars and video conferences could be saved to a

website for later viewing by those not attending the initial screening. Staff indicated that these kinds of centralized resources would improve understanding across AJC staff and consistency in POS implementation.

Some staff also noted that word of upcoming changes and new guidance often gets out well before the details are available; by the time that details are made available, the implementation timetable is sometimes short. If possible, staff would prefer longer implementation times, particularly if the details of the requirements are not known in advance.

C. Other Recommendations

A frequent recommendation was to advertise the services of the AJCs and the existence of POS more widely and earlier in the transition from military to civilian life. Staff report that many veterans do not know about POS and that the population in general does not know about the role of AJCs. Staff would particularly like to heighten awareness of POS and the workforce system among service members before they separate from the military, which staff do not see happening to the extent necessary, despite TAP. Staff proposed better, more assertive coordination with military partners and accessing lists of transitioning service members. Several staff members cited recent advertising by the VA hospitals and the services they have available, particularly in the areas of mental health and suicide prevention, as being a good model. Just as a member of the public might see the VA's campaign and mention to a veteran friend or family member that the VA might be a good resource, so too with the AJCs. This campaign would also familiarize the AJCs to employers looking to hire recently separated veterans, but who do not know where to find them. Staff suggested the campaign use various communication modes, such as print, radio, television, and social media. Staff mentioned social media, Facebook specifically, as requiring low cost and little effort and having potentially high yields because of its widespread use among young veterans and its linking aspect. Staff feel that the advertising should be done on either the national or state level, so that the campaign delivers a consistent, high quality, and appropriate message.

Some staff worry that the growing number of organizations available to assist veterans might confuse veterans about the role of each organization and the services available. Veterans might go to a private organization that advertises assistance in finding a job thinking that it is an AJC, not receive the full complement of services and funding possibilities available at the AJC, and not know to look further. AJC staff thought that developing a more coherent, recognizable brand for the AJCs was necessary to increase public knowledge and minimize confusion. With more unified branding, no matter where someone goes in a state, or perhaps the country, the public would then know where to look to find help in job search and training. When the brand name varies by county or region, people do not know what to look for or if such services exist there, if they are aware of them at all.

Staff as well as veterans participating in focus groups suggested creating military AJCs or transition centers to streamline access to priority workforce, VA, and medical services for transitioning service members, veterans, and eligible spouses. Staff in these military centers would be dedicated to veterans; they would have targeted training and be familiar with military language. Such centers would eliminate provision of redundant services by multiple agencies, an issue mentioned with some frequency. Multiple respondents felt this consolidation would save substantial amounts of money, which could be used for increased services to veterans. Alternatively, a subset of AJC staff could be dedicated to serving veterans.

Comparisons between staffing levels when American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 stimulus funds were in place and the present were frequent. Sites valued the positions those funds enabled them to fill and feel their loss. Many respondents mentioned additional staff as a way to improve the implementation of POS and services to veterans. Focus group participants suggested paying veterans' representatives on a commission basis, similar to private sector recruiters, as an incentive to identify more employment opportunities for veterans.

Several sites had successful practices they wished to recommend to other sites. These included the veterans' representatives building a cohort of veterans who attend classes as a group a couple of times per month, effectively becoming their own support group, and creating networking groups so veterans can share experiences with one another.

REFERENCES

GAO-06-176: "VETS: Labor Actions Needed to Improve Accountability and Help States Implement Reforms to Veterans' Employment Services." U.S. Government Accountability Office Report to Congressional Committees.

Mikelson, K., N. Pindus, et. al (the Urban Institute). Final Evaluation Report: "Strategies for Implementing POS to Veterans in DOL Programs." Prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration under Contract AF-12536-02-30, Washington, D.C., September 2004.

Trutko, John (Capital Research Corporation) and Burt Barnow (Johns Hopkins University, Institute for Policy Studies). Final Evaluation Report: "An Evaluation of the Priority of Service Provision of the Jobs for Veterans Act by the Workforce Investment System in Providing Services to Veterans and Other Covered Persons." Prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration under Contract J061A20363, June 2010.

APPENDIX A

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PRIORITY OF SERVICE PROVISION OF THE JOBS FOR VETERANS ACT OF 2002

The decade since the enactment of the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002 (JVA) has seen the passage of legislation, a Federal Register notice, several pieces of implementation guidance, and multiple studies on the topic. In this appendix we describe important aspects of these publications. Table A.1 summarizes legislation, guidance, and evaluation reports on priority of service (POS), including some that are only tangentially related to this study and are therefore not discussed in detail in this appendix.

A. Enactment of the Priority of Service Provision of the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002

On November 7, 2002, President George W. Bush signed Public Law 107-288, which amended Title 38 of the United States Code to establish POS for veterans and eligible spouses in any qualified job training program directly funded, in whole or part, by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). An eligible spouse was defined as the spouse of (1) a veteran who died of a service-connected disability; (2) a member of the armed forces who has been listed for at least 90 days as missing in action, captured in the line of duty by a hostile force, or forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty by a foreign government or power; (3) a veteran who has a total disability resulting from a service-connected disability; or (4) any veteran who died while such a disability was in existence.

"Priority of service" was defined to mean that a covered person should be given priority over nonveterans for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services provided the person otherwise meets the eligibility requirements for participation in the program. State- and local-level service providers were not only required to provide POS and inform each POS-eligible person of the rights and benefits to which they were entitled, but also to provide information on benefits and services available from other providers.

The law required that a comprehensive performance accountability system be developed within six months of the legislation's passage, to measure the performance of employment service delivery systems, including disabled veterans' outreach program specialists and local veterans' employment representatives providing employment, training, and placement services at the state level. The system was to be weighted to account for the additional services needed by veterans with disabilities and for veterans who enroll in readjustment counseling.

The Comptroller General was required to conduct and deliver to Congress a study of the Secretary's implementation of the JVA in program years 2003 and 2004. The study was to assess the act and its impact on employment, training, and placement services. Beginning in 2003, the Secretary of Labor was required to include an evaluation in the annual Report to Congress of whether covered persons were receiving POS and being fully served by qualified job training programs, and whether the representation of veterans in such programs was in proportion to the prevalence of veterans in the labor market. The Secretary was given authority to assign directors, assistant directors, and other federal personnel as needed to carry out the employment, training, and placement services required by the law.

The law also required that American Job Center services and assistance be provided to covered persons via the internet within 18 months of the legislation's passage; modified the duties of Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff; established performance incentive awards for providers of employment services; required a veteran's preference when awarding federal

contracts worth $100,000 or more; removed the requirement that the Assistant Secretary and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training be veterans; and structured the President's National Hire Veterans Committee.

B. Guidance on Implementing POS is Released by the Employment and Training Administration

Ten months after the legislation was enacted, the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) published Training and Employment Guidance Letter 5-03 (TEGL 5-03) with the purpose of informing states and other DOL workforce investment system partners of the POS provisions and providing general guidance on implementing them. The guidance listed many of the 20 DOL-funded programs covered by the law and indicated that separate guidance would be issued in the future for each affected program and for self-service tools. The TEGL reinforced the requirement that individuals receiving priority must first meet the eligibility criteria for a given program and that when the program's existing eligibility criteria target specific groups, veteran priority is a mandate but not one that is intended to displace the core function of the program. Several descriptions of how this would apply to different programs were provided as examples.

Notification was made in TEGL 5-03 that because JVA 2002 was a substantial change to federal law that affected the assumptions on which Workforce Investment Act (WIA) state plans were based, the plans would have to be modified. Because grant language would have to be modified to inform grantees of JVA 2002's requirements and states' obligation to design service delivery accordingly, ETA stated that it would provide all grantees with the necessary language in the form of a unilateral modification.

ETA also announced through TEGL 5-03 that it was revising its data collection system to include the necessary data and implement common measures across training programs. The new system would be announced through publication of a Federal Register notice. Until then, ETA would report based on current measures.

C. Congressional Report Required by JVA 2002 Released

A report entitled "Labor Actions Needed to Improve Accountability and Help States Implement Reforms to Veterans' Employment Services" (GAO-06-176) was released by the General Accounting Office (GAO) on December 30, 2005. GAO conducted surveys and site visits with state and local officials, American Job Centers, and the National Veterans' Training Institute. It found that DOL took action to implement most JVA provisions within the first two years of the legislation but that some federal actions and a lack of consensus in some areas had caused delays in areas such as updating federal contractor regulations and developing a national standard for veterans' employment.

Most state workforce administrators reported that the legislation had improved the quality of services to veterans as well as employment outcomes, largely due to expanded case management through DVOP specialists. In contrast, the lack of federal contractor compliance in listing job openings at local American Job Centers was reported to have limited veterans' employment opportunities. Officials in some areas were found to be unaware of or confused by DOL's guidance on the JVA POS requirements.

State Veterans' Employment Training Services (VETS) directors reported mixed outcomes of their monitoring role on local accountability for the DVOP and LVER programs. About half said their monitoring role had strengthened accountability, whereas one-third reported that it had lessened or not improved. Local-level data in 21 states were unavailable, potentially limiting federal oversight of these areas to twice-a-decade site visits. The lack of coordination between agencies within DOL was seen as weakening performance accountability and the lack of a strategy at VETS to use monitoring results to improve program performance was viewed as problematic.

Suggestions for improvements regarding integration of veterans' staff into One-Stops, coordinated monitoring, implementation and enforcement of federal contractor requirements, and other issues were made and generally concurred with by DOL.

D. Public Law 109-461 and the Final Rule Enacted

Enacted on December 22, 2006, Section 605 of public law 109-461 required that the Secretary of Labor prescribe regulations to implement the JVA within two years. The Secretary's response was the Priority of Service for Covered Persons Final Rule, published in the Federal Register as 20 CFR Part 1010 on December 19, 2008. This notice detailed the provisions of the JVA and gave clear definitions of who was eligible, the impacts for various programs, and what American Job Centers would have to do to comply. It responded to questions and comments received during the public comment period, providing additional information on areas that had caused concern or that were not fully understood by readers of the initial notice.

E. Simultaneous Guidance From VETS and ETA on POS Implementation

On November 10, 2009, ETA published TEGL 10-09 and VETS published Veterans' Program Letter (VPL) 07-09. These documents described the history of the JVA up to that point and summarized much of the content of the Final Rule, explaining the concepts using more accessible language and formats. They provided considerable clarification and detail on when veteran status should be obtained, when priority should be applied, when veteran status should be verified, and the variety of documents and systems through which the verification could be made. How POS for veterans interacts with the other service requirements in programs with statutory priorities and discretionary priorities was also described.

TEGL 10-09 also included a list of the six programs that would be required to report quarterly data, a description of the requirements to fall into that group, an example of the quarterly report to be submitted by those programs, and the time frame under which the various programs would have to begin reporting. DOL stated that it would monitor the implementation of POS and that program operators were required to ensure that POS is applied throughout their systems and were expected to ensure that the policies and procedures of local providers resulted in compliance with POS.

Also addressed were aspects of workforce programs that are outside of the direct scope of POS but that are operationally related, such as the exemption of military service-related income when determining income eligibility for programs, the availability of both WIA and Veterans Affairs-funded training, and unemployment insurance programs that interface with services.

An extensive list of frequently asked questions was also included to provide easy reference to answers to common questions.

F. Early Research Findings on POS Implementation

A study by John Trutko of Capital Research Corporation and Burt Barnow of Johns Hopkins University focused on assessing the extent to which POS requirements were being met, particularly at the state and local levels through the One-Stop system. It was spurred by a recommendation in GAO-06-176 to improve accountability and help states integrate veterans' services in the American Job Centers. This early study involved analysis of data in the Workforce Investment Act Standardized Record Data (WIASRD) database, site visits to American Job Centers in seven states, and interviews with representatives of veterans' and workforce organizations. The study was conceptualized and begun before issuance of the Final Rule, and many of the site visits were conducted before, or just after, its issuance at the end of 2008.

Site visits showed that all states had strong outreach programs to bring veterans into American Job Centers and that they tried to identify veterans upon entry. States varied in their approaches to serving veterans, with many having activities that were intended to enhance services but were not POS related. Some states developed and communicated clear POS policies, whereas others simply passed the ETA guidance (TEGL 5-03 and questions and answers from ETA's web site) on, and still others were unclear what activities constituted POS. The guidance from ETA was considered vague and did not carry the weight of regulations, and details such as how to identify eligible spouses and how POS interacts with priority for other groups specified in WIA were often not understood.

Findings from the interviews with representatives of veterans' and workforce organizations revealed a desire for ETA to issue formal regulations and methods to ensure enforcement of POS at the state and local levels, a feeling that the guidance issued was not sufficiently detailed or clear, and that workforce investment boards (WIBs) and American Job Centers sometimes had incomplete or incorrect knowledge of POS.

The study noted that the issuance of the Final Rule made some of its findings obsolete and that activities at American Job Centers would likely change due to its issuance.

G. Protocol for Implementing Priority of Service for Veterans and Eligible Spouses

Exactly a year after the issuance of joint guidance by ETA and VETS on the implementation of POS, TEGL 15-10—a Protocol for Implementing Priority of Service for Veterans and Eligible Spouses—was issued. This publication was geared toward service providers and provided action steps to undertake in implementing POS. It was more concise and accessible than earlier documents and focused on the information a person delivering services would have to understand. References were provided to other resources.

Table A.1 Chronology of Veterans' Priority of Service Legislation, Guidance, and Evaluation

Document	Publication Date
Public Law 107-288: Jobs for Veterans Act	11/7/2002
Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 5-03: Implementing the Veterans' Priority Provisions of the "Jobs for Veterans Act"	9/16/2003
Final Evaluation Report: "Assessment of Unemployed Veterans' Needs for the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service". Prepared by Battelle Memorial Institute.	11/30/2003
Final Evaluation Report: "Strategies for Implementing POS to Veterans in DOL Programs". Prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration under Contract AF-12536-02-30, by the Urban Institute (Mikelson, K., Pindus, N., et. al.). Washington, D.C.	9/2004
GAO-06-176: "VETS: Labor Actions Needed to Improve Accountability and Help States Implement Reforms to Veterans' Employment Services". U.S. Government Accountability Office Report to Congressional Committees.	12/30/2005
Public Law 109-461: Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006	12/22/2006
Information Collection Request (ICR) 200805-1205-001 for JVA-related reporting requirements	8/14/2008
20 CFR Part 1010: VETS Priority of Service for Covered Persons, Final Rule, *Federal Register* notice	12/19/2008
Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 10-09: Implementing POS for Veterans and Eligible Spouses in all Qualified Job Training Programs Funded in Whole or in Part by DOL	11/10/2009
Veterans' Program Letter (VPL) 07-09: Implementing POS for Veterans and Eligible Spouses in All Qualified Job Training Programs Funded in Whole or in Part by DOL	11/10/2009
Final Evaluation Report: "An Evaluation of the Priority of Service Provision of the Jobs for Veterans Act by the Workforce Investment System in Providing Services to Veterans and Other Covered Persons". Prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration under Contract J061A20363, by Trutko, John (Capital Research Corporation) and Barnow, Burt (Johns Hopkins University, Institute for Policy Studies).	6/2010
Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 15-10: Protocol for Implementing POS for Veterans and Eligible Spouses in All Qualified Job Training Programs Funded in Whole or in Part by DOL	11/10/2010

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Table B.1. Research Interests, Rationales for Inclusion, and Respondent Types

Research Interest	Rational for Inclusion	Respondent Type		
		Workforce System Staff	Veteran and Spouse	VSO
A. Identification of Veterans and Eligible Spouses				
1. How does the workforce investment system identify veterans?	TEGL-10-09, items 5 and 6	X		X
2. How does the workforce investment system identify eligible spouses?	TEGL-10-09, items 5 and 6	X		X
3. How does the workforce investment system inform covered persons of their entitlement to POS?	TEGL-10-09, items 5 and 8	X	X	X
4. Are eligible persons aware of their eligibility before interaction with the workforce investment system?	TEGL-10-09, items 8 and 9	X	X	X
5. To what extent did the ETA and VETS guidance help American Job Centers to more quickly and accurately identify veterans and eligible spouses?	ETA study objective	X		X
B. POS Procedures				
1. How does the American Job Center system track POS-eligible veterans and spouses?	TEGL-10-09, item 8	X		
2. What mechanisms are used to ensure POS is being given?	TEGL-10-09, item 8	X		
3. In what ways is POS implemented (for example, differential intake and/or flow, access to materials and systems, extra contact, additional programming, job holds, and so on)?	Final Rule Response 14 and Subpart C	X	X	X
4. When is priority being applied? Is it being applied in the right order when there are multiple considerations? Are state/local operators adding any discretionary ordering they do not have authority to add?	TEGL-10-09, items 7 and 10	X	X	X
5. At what stage is eligibility being verified? Are a variety of documents and systems being allowed to verify eligibility?	TEGL-10-09, item 9 and Attachment A Part 1b	X	X	X
6. What data are being reported? To what extent are data being used to track POS implementation? By whom?	TEGL-10-09, items 11 and 12 and Subpart C	X		
7. To what extent and how have the procedures of and services provided by the workforce investment system changed since the POS implementation guidance was issued?	ETA study objective	X		X

Research Interest	Rational for Inclusion	Respondent Type		
		Workforce System Staff	Veteran and Spouse	VSO
8. Is monitoring taking place and is it effective?	TEGL-10-09, parts 11 and 12 and Attachment B Q/A item 11; Barnow and Trutko pp. 60–62; GAO-06-176 pp. 4, 31–32	X		X
C. Provision of Services				
1. How is service delivery to veterans and nonveterans distributed across mainstream American Job Center staff and LVER/DVOP staff? [**ETA NOTE:** This is an important question because prior work indicates that some One-Stops send all veterans to LVER/DVOP staff. This would be an incorrect interpretation of how POS is to be implemented. In this study we want to explore whether Centers are still sending all veterans to LVER/DVOP staff.]	TEGL-10-09, Attachment A, Part 2; Barnow and Trutko p. 34	X	X	X
2. Are intake workers, case managers, and other types of staff knowledgeable about POS and how it is to be implemented? What kind of training is in place for each type of staff? Are TANF and other programs in the American Job Center aware of POS? How are referrals made?	Final Rule, Part II Response 10, page 78135 TEN-15-10, Attachment A, DOL protocol, p. 7; Barnow and Trutko p. 63; GAO-06-176 pp. 24–25	X	X	X
3. Are veterans and eligible spouses aware of the different types of staff mentioned in the previous question? Do they find differential knowledge or treatment among the types of staff? Do they try to get assigned to (or avoid being assigned to) American Job Center or DVOP/LVER staff for case management? [**ETA NOTE:** Studies reference differential levels of knowledge about POS among staff with some staff having little training on the topic, while guidance indicates that all staff, including those from other programs, should be trained on POS. In this study we want to explore whether veterans find consistent knowledge and treatment across staff in the Centers.]	Final Rule, Part II Response 10, p. 78135 TEN-15-10, Attachment A, DOL protocol, p. 7	X	X	X

Research Interest	Rational for Inclusion	Respondent Type		
		Workforce System Staff	Veteran and Spouse	VSO
4. How are self-service and electronic tools being used? How is POS implemented through them? Is this satisfactory? Are web sites and other self-service places providing enough access to information, beyond referrals to/mention of LVER/DVOP staff? [**ETA NOTE:** TEGL 10-09 is very specific about what is required and we would like to explore if this guidance is being met. Any self-service tool or web site developed with funding from a qualified job training program or grant is expected to provide information on POS and how to access assistance. We will therefore explore current practices in implementing POS through these web sites.]	TEGL-10-09, Attachment A, Part 4 d	X	X	X
5. What steps have been taken by the workforce investment boards and American Job Centers to ensure that veterans and eligible spouses receive POS with regard to training and job referrals?	ETA study objective	X	X	X
6. Is program eligibility being correctly determined? Are income exclusions being used correctly? Are veterans being told they have to exhaust other benefits or that they cannot combine different types? [**ETA NOTE:** These were noted as issues in prior POS studies and it is important to see if they have been rectified.]	TEGL-10-09, item 6, Attachment A, Parts 1a and 3	X	X	X
7. Do veterans find that their military experience, training, and jobs are understood by American Job Center and other staff? What tools are staff using to translate these military experiences, training, and jobs to civilian opportunities?	ETA study objective	X	X	X
8. To what extent has the POS implementation guidance facilitated service delivery to veterans and eligible spouses?	ETA study objective	X		X
9. How can the LVER/DVOP staff assist American Job Center staff implement POS?	ETA study objective	X		X
10. How can POS be improved?	ETA study objective	X	X	X

APPENDIX C

DISCUSSION GUIDES

ASSESSMENT OF THE WORKFORCE SYSTEM'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRIORITY OF SERVICE PROVISION OF THE JOBS FOR VETERANS ACT OF 2002

Workforce System Administrator/Advance Questions

Local Workforce Investment Area: _____

One-Stop Career Center[5] Location: _____

Respondent Name: _____

Discussion Date/Time: _____

A. Introduction to the Study

Hi. This is _____ (calling) from Mathematica Policy Research. Thank you very much for agreeing to talk with us. We hope to learn as much as we can about how Priority of Service is implemented throughout the workforce system by talking with One-Stop Career Center staff, veterans and eligible spouses, and representatives of veterans' service organizations.

Just a couple of things…

We will not share your comments today with anyone outside the immediate study team at Mathematica. Our report will describe the experiences and viewpoints expressed, but comments will not be attributed to specific individuals.

I would like to record our discussion so I can listen to it later when I write up my notes. No one outside the immediate team will listen to the tape. If you want to say anything that you do not want taped, please let me know and I will be glad to pause the tape recorder. Do you have any objections to being part of this interview or to my taping our discussion?

This discussion will last about 60 minutes. Once again, thank you for participating. Do you have any questions before we get started?

[5] All but one site visit occurred prior to the release of TEGL 36-11, which renamed the One-Stop Career Centers to American Job Centers.

B. Individual Background

I'd like to start by briefly talking about your job and your overall responsibilities.

1. How long have you worked at the _____?
2. How long have you held your current position?
3. What are your major responsibilities in this position?
4. Do you have any specific responsibilities related to veterans' priority of service?
5. Do you have a military background?

C. LWIA and One-Stop Career Center Questions

1. Please describe the state, WIB, and local workforce structure and how these organizations work together. (Name organizations.)
2. Please provide a general overview of your local economy and how the One-Stop Career Center System supports its needs.
   a. How many full-service and satellite centers serve the local area?
   b. [If there is more than one center] Are they structured the same way or differently? How?
   c. Have there been any civilian events affecting local job availability such as recent mass layoffs or plant or office closings?
   d. Have there been any recent or planned military base realignments, expansions, or closures? What are the size, timing, and estimated effect of these changes on the local workforce and One-Stop Career Center(s)?
   e. Have the One-Stop Career Centers experienced any significant changes in the past three years? For example, in customer volume, customer flow, or outcomes? Please describe these changes.
3. About how many customers are served by this One-Stop Career Center? How does this volume compare to the other Centers in your local area? I'd like to get some more detail on what share of your customers are veterans and on the characteristics of the veterans and nonveterans you serve. If I send you an Excel table about this, would you have access to data that you could fill in? (Estimates by day, week, month, or year are fine. Specify unit of time, any inclusions or exclusions to the data, and whether site is providing core or intensive counts.)
   a. Total number of One-Stop Career Center customers
   b. Number/percentage who are veterans
   c. Number/percentage of veterans eligible for priority of service (POS); number/percentage of eligible spouses
4. Please describe the staffing structure at this One-Stop Career Center, (including any partners). It would be great if you could send us any staffing diagrams, organizational charts, or other materials your site may have. There will be some

other things that might be easier to send as well. I'll make a list of them and email it to you later so you don't have to worry about keeping track.

a. How are staff organized—for example, by program or by function (such as intake workers, case managers, staff on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and other programs, and so on)?

b. How many paid staff are assigned to each program or function?

c. What and how many partner staff are on site versus available on a referral basis?

d. Are Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists or Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff located on site? If so, how many and is there a full-time presence? If part-time, how many hours are they on site each week?

e. Who sees DVOP and LVER staff?

5. Are you familiar with the customer flow process at the One-Stop Center? Please describe it. If one is available, please provide a flow diagram that shows the typical flow through the system from the point of intake forward, highlighting any differences between veterans and nonveterans in terms of flow, services, or who provides the services.

   a. What is the intake procedure?

   b. How do customers move from intake to various services such as assessments, training, and job search or placement?

   c. How and when is POS implemented?

      - How are veterans and eligible spouses defined in local policy and practice?
      - When is information needed for POS determination collected?
      - How are job holds handled for veterans? Can employers identify veteran job seekers?
      - How do you track veterans and other eligibles? (Probe about state and local computer systems, whether and by whom data are analyzed.)

6. We have a few questions about differences in serving veterans and nonveterans in your area.

   a. Is it easier to get veterans or nonveterans to use One-Stop Career Center services? Why?

   b. Do your One-Stop Career Centers use the same outreach methods to inform veterans and nonveterans about available services and job openings? Are there any special efforts to inform veterans?

   c. Do your One-Stop Career Centers receive referrals of veterans from other programs, military facilities, employers, schools, or other sources?

   d. How do the characteristics and service needs of the veterans served compare with nonveterans served through the One-Stop Career Centers? Are there unique characteristics and service needs in the various Centers?

e. Is it easier or more difficult to provide services to veterans compared to nonveterans? Why? (E.g. skills translation, language and presentation format)

f. How do training and employment outcomes for veterans and nonveterans using One-Stop Career Center services compare? If they differ, why do you think this is?

7. As you might know, DOL issued a Final Rule, two guidances, and a VPL—(20 CFR Part 1010) (TEGL 10-09) (TEN 15-10) (VPL 07-09)—to provide better instruction on how to implement POS. How familiar are you with this guidance? Do you think the guidance is useful?

8. [Interviewer Note: Review state and local web sites before visit. Bring printout of any guidance from websites or received in response to advance questions as a reminder.] Has the state provided any direction, requirements, or assistance regarding serving veterans or implementing POS in the past three years? Please describe. Has the state guidance been helpful? Is this more guidance than the state has provided in the past? May I please have a copy of these new policies and procedures? Please also provide any local policies regarding veteran's POS in One-Stop Career Centers. (If not already obtained.)

9. Is there a statewide plan for how information on veterans' POS should be provided on state and local websites and other media? What does the information path look like for employers seeking veterans? What does the information path look like for veterans seeking jobs?

10. What challenges have you encountered in implementing POS? For example, what challenges have you encountered in identifying veterans and eligible spouses?

11. Are there aspects of POS that you think are commonly misunderstood or misapplied?

12. What about POS works really well in your One-Stop Career Center(s)?

13. In addition to what we've already discussed, what recommendations do you have for the Department of Labor regarding POS for veterans?

D. Closing

1. That completes the questions I have for you today.

2. Is there anything I should have asked about but didn't?

3. Do you have anything you would like to tell me or questions you would like to ask me?

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me. I appreciate and value your input. As we discussed, I'll send you an email requesting the items we talked about.

Documentation to obtain from One-Stop Career Center:

1. Excel table with One-Stop Career Center customer counts
2. Staffing diagrams and/or organizational charts
3. Customer flow diagram
4. Sign-in log
5. Photos/observational notes
6. State and local POS policies
7. Other materials related to POS and veterans' services

ASSESSMENT OF THE WORKFORCE SYSTEM'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRIORITY OF SERVICE PROVISION OF THE JOBS FOR VETERANS ACT OF 2002

Workforce System Staff Discussion Guide

One-Stop Career Center Location: _____

Respondent Name: _____

Interview Date/Time: _____

Interviewer: _____

A. Introduction to the Study

Hi, my name is _____and I'm from Mathematica Policy Research. Thanks for agreeing to participate in this discussion. Your input will be really useful. Do you have any questions or comments about the study?

Just a couple of things before we start…

We will not share your comments today with anyone outside the immediate study team at Mathematica. Our report will describe the experiences and viewpoints expressed, but comments will not be attributed to specific individuals.

I would like to record our discussion so I can listen to it later when I write up my notes. No one outside the immediate team will listen to the tape. If you want to say anything that you do not want taped, please let me know and I will be glad to pause the tape recorder. Do you have any objections to being part of this interview or to my taping our discussion?

This discussion will last about 60 minutes. Once again, thank you for participating. Do you have any questions before we get started?

B. Individual Background

I'd like to start by briefly talking about your job and your overall responsibilities.

1. How long have you worked at this One-Stop Career Center?
2. What is your current position and job title?
3. How long have you held this position?
4. What are your major responsibilities in this position?
5. Do you have specific responsibilities related to veterans' priority of service?
6. Do you have a military background?

C. IDENTIFICATION OF VETERANS AND ELIGIBLE SPOUSES

1. How are customers in this One-Stop Career Center typically identified as veterans? When does veteran identification take place? How is a veteran defined for POS?
2. What about eligible spouses? How and when are they typically identified? How is an eligible spouse defined for POS?
3. How are veterans and eligible spouses informed of their entitlement to POS?
4. Do veterans and eligible spouses typically come to the One-Stop Career Center with some familiarity of POS? Do they typically know whether they are eligible? How are they learning about POS (veterans' service organizations [VSOs], internet, friends)?
5. Please tell me about any outreach the One-Stop Career Center does to eligible populations (out-stationing, brochures, and so on)?
6. Do One-Stop Career Center customers who are not eligible ever think they are? Why? How often does this happen (for example, frequently, infrequently, never)?

D. POS Procedures

1. When is eligibility for POS verified? How do you verify eligibility? What kinds of documents and/or systems are used?
2. After a veteran or spouse eligible for POS is identified, when is POS implemented?
3. In what ways is POS implemented? (Probe for differential intake and/or flow, access to materials and systems, extra contact, additional programs, job holds, etc.)
4. (Only ask if it sounds like there is a hole in the system.) In general, how does your One-Stop Career Center ensure that all eligible veterans and spouses receive POS?
5. Are you involved in placing or referring veterans into programs with multiple eligibility requirements? What role does POS play when there are multiple criteria for eligibility?
    a. Are there programs or situations for which you have developed other kinds of ordering of who gets services or funding? Please tell me about those.
    b. Please tell me about how military income, military disability, and other military payments are handled in determining program eligibility?
    c. Please tell me about different types of benefits veterans are eligible for in terms of what can and can't be combined? Are there any benefits that have to be exhausted before other kinds can be used?
6. How does your One-Stop Career Center track POS eligibles and the services they receive? What information is tracked? Who has access to this information?
7. Does someone here or at the state level analyze this information and provide feedback? What kind of feedback is provided? (For example, effectiveness of POS, need for additional services.)
8. Is any other kind of monitoring of POS taking place? What kind and by whom? Do you think it is effective?

E. PROVISION OF SERVICES

1. Do all types of staff (such as intake workers, case managers, staff on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF] and other programs, etc.) have a consistent understanding of POS and how it should be implemented?
2. What training on POS and veterans' issues is in place for each type of staff? Is this adequate for each type of staff?
3. Are Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Trade Adjustment Act (TAA), TANF, and staff from other programs located at the One-Stop Career Center properly implementing POS? How are referrals made across programs?
4. When eligibles come to the One-Stop Career Center for services, are they assigned to certain staff members or types of staff? How are these assignments made? How does this differ from the process for other One-Stop Career Center customers?
5. Who sees LVER and DVOP staff?
6. Do eligibles ever request specific staff because of their perceived knowledge about veterans' issues or POS?
7. Besides the One-Stop Career Center's general web page that we discussed earlier, what kinds of self-service or electronic tools are in use here? (Skill assessments, resume builders, etc.) How are they accessed? How is POS implemented through them?
8. How do you help veterans translate their military experiences, training, and jobs to civilian opportunities? Do you use specific tools? What are they? How do you find out about these tools?
9. Do you generally understand the terminology veterans use to describe their military jobs? Do you generally understand the experience and training they received in the military? Do you think other staff at this One-Stop Career Center have a good understanding of how military experience translates to civilian jobs?
10. Please describe the relationship between LVER/DVOP staff and other One-Stop Career Center staff? How could these different staff better collaborate in implementing POS?
11. Have you seen changes in how POS is implemented in the One-Stop Career Center in the time that you have worked here? How and when did it change? (For example, local processes for identifying eligibles, services provided.) Are these improvements? Why or why not? Are further changes needed? Please describe.
12. As you might know, DOL issued the Final Rule, two guidances, and a VPL— (20 CFR Part 1010) (TEGL 10-09) (TEN 15-10) (VPL 07-09)—to provide better instruction on how to implement POS. How familiar are you with this guidance? Do you think the guidance is useful? Do you think the guidance contributed to the changes you just described? What other factors might have influenced these changes?
13. [Interviewer Note: Review state and local web sites before visit. Bring printout of any guidance from websites or received in response to advance questions as a reminder.] Has the state provided any direction, requirements, or assistance

regarding serving veterans or implementing POS in the past three years? Please describe. Has the state guidance been helpful? Is this more guidance than the state has provided in the past? May I please have a copy of these new policies and procedures? Please also provide any local policies regarding veteran's POS in One-Stop Career Centers. (If not already obtained.)

14. What challenges have you encountered in implementing the federal guidance? For example, what challenges have you encountered in identifying veterans and eligible spouses?
15. Are there aspects of POS that you think are commonly misunderstood or misapplied?
16. How could POS or the way it is implemented be improved in this One-Stop Career Center?
17. What about POS works really well in this One-Stop Career Center?
18. In addition to what we've already discussed, what recommendations do you have for the Department of Labor regarding POS for veterans?

F. CLOSING

1. That completes the questions I have for you today.
2. Is there anything I should have asked about but didn't?
3. Do you have anything you would like to tell me or questions you would like to ask me?
4. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me. I appreciate and value your input.

ASSESSMENT OF THE WORKFORCE SYSTEM'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRIORITY OF SERVICE PROVISION OF THE JOBS FOR VETERANS ACT OF 2002

Veteran and Eligible Spouse Discussion Group Guide

One-Stop Career Center Location:_____

Discussion Group Date/Time:_____

Discussion Group Moderator:_____

Respondents' Names:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

A. Introduction to the Study

Hi, my name is _____ and I work for Mathematica Policy Research, an independent social policy research firm. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this discussion. As you might know, we are conducting a study for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) concerning implementation of veterans' Priority of Service (POS) under the Jobs for Veterans Act. I am here to learn as much as I can about how Priority of Service is implemented throughout the workforce system. Your participation is very important to the study. I will also be talking with other One-Stop Career Center staff, veterans and eligible spouses, and representatives of veterans' service organizations (VSOs).

We will not share your comments today with anyone outside the immediate study team at Mathematica. Our report will describe the experiences and viewpoints expressed, but comments will not be attributed to specific individuals.

I would like to record our discussion so I can listen to it later when I write up my notes. No one outside the immediate research team will listen to the tape. If you want to say anything that you do not want taped, please let me know and I will be glad to pause the tape recorder. Do you have any objections to being part of this discussion or to my taping our discussion?

This discussion will last about 90 minutes. Once again, thank you for participating. Do you have any questions before we get started?

First I'd like to find out a little about each of you. If you are a veteran, please tell us what branch you were in and when you separated. If you're a spouse, please tell us your spouse's branch as well as how long you have been eligible for POS.

B. Focus Group Discussion Topics

1. Are you familiar with Priority of Service for veterans and eligible spouses? What is POS—what are you entitled to or should you receive because of POS? Were you familiar with it before your first contact with the One-Stop Career Center system? Where did you first hear about it? For those of you who first learned about POS from some place other than the One-Stop Career Center, how did the One-Stop Career Center compare as a source of information on POS? [Research questions A.3, 4]
2. When and how did the One-Stop Career Center inform you of your eligibility for POS? When and how was your eligibility for POS verified? (Probe: one document, multiple documents, which one(s), fully automated system/no documentation.) Did the process work well? If not, what would have worked better? [B.5]
3. In what ways have you received Priority of Service at this One-Stop Career Center? [B.3] Were there times when you think you should have received POS at this One-Stop Career Center but did not? What happened? How was the situation resolved? [B.5] Are you aware of any controls in place at the One-Stop Career Center to ensure that veterans and eligible spouses receive POS? [C.5]
4. Please tell me about all the staff with whom you have interacted at the One-Stop Career Center. Are staff in different positions—such as intake workers and case managers—sufficiently knowledgeable about POS? [C.2] Which staff are more knowledgeable about POS? Which staff are less knowledgeable? Do differences in staff knowledge about POS have any effect on your experience with the One-Stop Career Center?
5. Has anyone been referred to a Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff or a Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist for services? How does their knowledge of veterans in general and POS in particular compare to that of general One-Stop Career Center staff? Has anyone worked with staff from Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Trade Adjustment Act (TAA), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or one of the other special programs here? Are those staff aware of POS and how to apply it? [C.1,2,3]
6. Now let's talk about when your eligibility for a specific program or service is determined. Has anyone experienced issues with how military disability, retirement, regular pay, or other military income was counted when the One-Stop Career Center was deciding eligibility for certain programs? What was the issue? (For example, having payments that should be excluded from income included, being told you have to exhaust one type of benefit before you can access another, or that you can't combine different types.) How was it resolved? [C.6]
7. Have you used any self-service tools or web sites provided by the One-Stop Career Center, either here or from home or elsewhere? What were they? Have you also used

private web sites, such as Monster.com or Military.com, for these types of activities? How do the One-Stop Career Center sites and private sites compare in terms of the quantity and usefulness of the information and tools they provide? [C.4]

8. How well are your military experience, training, and jobs understood by One-Stop Career Center staff? Were staff in different positions, such as intake workers and case managers, sufficiently knowledgeable about veterans? Which were more or less knowledgeable? Have staff been able to help translate your military skills and experience to civilian terminology? Do they use any specific tools to try to do this? What kinds of tools? Do you think this process works well or needs improvement? If it needs improvement, what additional tools should be used or changes made? [C.7]
9. How can services for POS-eligible veterans and spouses be improved at this One-Stop Career Center? What works really well? [C.10]
10. In addition to what we've already discussed, what recommendations do you have for the Department of Labor regarding POS for veterans?

C. Closing

1. That completes the questions I have for you today.
2. Is there anything I should have asked about but didn't?
3. Do you have anything you would like to tell me or questions you would like to ask me?
4. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me. I appreciate and value your input.

ASSESSMENT OF THE WORKFORCE SYSTEM'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRIORITY OF SERVICE PROVISION OF THE JOBS FOR VETERANS ACT OF 2002

Veterans' Service Organization Discussion Guide

Respondent Name: _____

Interview Date/Time:_____

Interviewer: _____

A. Introduction to the Study

Hi, my name is _____ and I work for Mathematica Policy Research, an independent social policy research firm. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this discussion. As you know, we are conducting a study for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) concerning implementation of veterans' Priority of Service (POS) under the Jobs for Veterans Act.

We will not share your comments today with anyone outside the immediate study team at Mathematica. Our report will describe the experiences and viewpoints expressed, but comments will not be attributed to specific individuals.

I would like to record our discussion so I can listen to it later when I write up my notes. No one outside the immediate team will listen to the tape. If you want to say anything that you do not want taped, please let me know and I will be glad to pause the tape recorder. Do you have any objections to being part of this interview or to my taping our discussion?

This discussion will last about 60 minutes. Once again, thank you for participating. Do you have any questions before we get started?

B. Individual Background

I'd like to start by briefly talking about your job and your overall responsibilities.

1. How long have you worked for _____?
2. What is your current position and job title?
3. How long have you held this position?
4. What are your major responsibilities in this position?
5. What is your military background, if any?

C. Available Services

1. What's the service area of your organization? Please describe.
2. Please describe the relationship (nature, type, duration, and intensity) between your organization, the U.S. Department of Labor, the state workforce security agencies, the One-Stop Career Centers, and the workforce investment board(s) [WIB(s)]?
3. What employment and training services does your organization offer?
4. Do any of your services duplicate those offered by the One-Stops? Why is this?
5. Do you see any gaps in the employment and training services provided by the local One-Stops? Does your organization offer services in order to try to fill those gaps?

D. Identification of Veterans and Eligible Spouses

1. Are veterans and eligible spouses served by your organization typically aware of POS? Do they know whether they are eligible? Are there differences in awareness between veterans and eligible spouses?
2. How do they typically learn about POS (One-Stop Career Centers, VSOs, internet, friends, or other sources)?
3. What does your organization do to increase awareness and knowledge about POS? Do you use different approaches to target veterans and eligible spouses (outstationing, brochures)? What reaction, if any, have you received from employers and civilians regarding POS?
4. Are you familiar with how customers in One-Stop Career Centers are typically identified as veterans or eligible spouses? In your view, are these methods adequate to ensure that any veteran potentially eligible for POS is identified? For example, are veterans and eligible spouses correctly defined? If not, why not, and how can the process be improved?
5. How are veterans and eligible spouses typically informed of their entitlement to POS in One-Stop Career Centers ? In your view, are these processes adequate to ensure that anyone entitled to POS is made aware of their entitlement? If not, why not, and how can the situation be improved?
6. Are you familiar with local One-Stop Career Center websites? Do these web sites generally provide sufficient and accurate information on POS, and on how veterans and eligible spouses can access assistance at the One-Stop Career Centers? If not, what can be done to improve the site(s)?
7. Which states have coordinated information on veterans' POS through state and local websites and other media? What do those information paths look like for employers seeking veterans and for veterans seeking jobs?

E. POS Procedures

1. Are veterans and spouses reporting any issues in proving eligibility for POS or for specific programs, such as when there are multiple criteria for program eligibility? Where? For which programs? What kinds of issues do you hear about? (Probe: required to show DD-214, incorrect application of income exclusions, veteran told to exhaust other benefits first, veteran told can't combine benefits, etc.) Which issues are most common? Least common? Is your organization involved in resolving these situations? If so, how? In your view, is the process at One-Stop Career Centers typically adequate and proper to ensure that eligibility for POS is properly verified? If not, why not, and how can it be improved?
2. Are you familiar with how DOL One-Stop Career Centers typically implement POS? Please describe. (Probe for: Differential intake and/or flow, access to materials and systems, extra contact, additional programs, job holds, etc.) In your view, is this process typically adequate to ensure that POS is properly implemented? If not, why not, and how can it be improved? Does the process vary across One-Stop Career Centers? How does it vary?
3. Are you aware of any monitoring of POS provision in the DOL One-Stop Career Centers? What kind and by whom? Do you think it is effective?
4. In general, do you think that Workforce Investment Boards and local DOL One-Stop Career Centers adequately ensure that eligible veterans and spouses receive POS? If not, what changes should they make to achieve this goal?

F. Provision of Services

1. In your experience, do veterans find that their military experience, training, and jobs are sufficiently understood by One-Stop Career Center staff? Do they find certain kinds of One-Stop Career Center staff more knowledgeable in this area?
2. In general, do you think DOL One-Stop Career Center staff are successfully translating these military experiences, training, and jobs to civilian opportunities? What tools are they using? Does your organization work on job translation? What tools does your organization recommend? Has your organization collaborated with any One-Stop Career Centers on job translation?
3. Have you seen changes in how POS is implemented in the One-Stop Career Centers in the time that you have been with _____? How and when did it change? (Probe: e.g. local processes for identifying eligibles, services provided.) Are these improvements? Why or why not? Are further changes needed? Please describe.
4. As you might know, DOL issued the Final Rule, two guidances, and a VPL— (20 CFR Part 1010) (TEGL 10-09) (TEN 15-10) (VPL 07-09)—to provide better instruction on how to implement POS. How familiar are you with this guidance? Do you think the guidance has been useful? Do you think the guidance contributed to the changes you just described? What other factors might have influenced these changes?
5. How could POS or the way it is implemented be improved?
6. Are there aspects of POS that you think are commonly misunderstood or misapplied?

7. What about POS works really well in the One-Stop Career Centers?
8. In addition to what we've already discussed, what recommendations do you have for the Department of Labor regarding POS for veterans?

G. Closing

1. That completes the questions I have for you today.
2. Is there anything I should have asked about but didn't?
3. Do you have anything you would like to tell me or questions you would like to ask me?
4. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me. I appreciate and value your input.

APPENDIX D

STUDY SITE PROFILE: ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

I. DESCRIPTION OF STUDY SITE

A. Population and Local Area Description

Alaska has the fourth-smallest population of the 50 states, at about 714,000 inhabitants, exceeding only that of North Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming. Of the total population, 507,000 people, or 71.1 percent, are ages 18 or older. The median age is 33.8 years, making Alaska the third-youngest state after Utah and Texas. About 71,000 people, or 14.1 percent of the adult population, are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. By race, 70.9 percent of Alaskans are white, 13.5 percent are American Indian or Alaska Native, 5.6 percent are Asian, 3.2 percent are black, and the rest are of other races. Hispanics, who can be of any race, make up 4.7 percent of the population of Alaska. Of those ages 25 and older, 9.4 percent have earned a graduate or professional degree and 18.5 percent have a bachelor's degree. In this age group, 8.2 percent have an associate's degree and 25.3 percent graduated from high school or have an equivalency certificate or degree.[6]

As of April 2012, the unemployment rate in Alaska was 6.9 percent, significantly lower than the national unemployment rate of 8.1 percent.[7] In the past decade, unemployment in Alaska peaked around 8.2 percent in late 2009/early 2010, and about 7.8 percent in the summer of 2003, with a trough at 5.9 percent in early 2007.[8]

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), which is adjacent to Anchorage, the site in Alaska selected for this study, is the largest installation in Alaska and is home to the Air Force Alaskan Command, Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) Region; the 11th Air Force; the 3rd Wing, U.S. Army Alaska; the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne); the 25th Infantry Division; and the 2nd Engineer Brigade. It was formed by the merger of Elmendorf Air Force Base and Army Fort Richardson by the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission in 2005. About 12,000 service members and their families live on the joint installation.

Anchorage, located in the south-central part of the state, is Alaska's largest city and constitutes more than 40 percent of the state's population. Anchorage began as a railroad construction port for the Alaska Railroad and later grew due to the military presence and an oil boom in Prudhoe Bay. The military, as well as mining and natural resource extraction activities and fishing, remain large industry sectors.

Overall, customers of Anchorage's Midtown Job Center[9], a focus of this study, were similar to those served at centers across Alaska in terms of their age and sex distribution. Veterans and

[6] Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, Tables DP02, DP03, and DP05.

[7] Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Regional and State Employment and Unemployment, April 2012—May 18, 2012.

[8] Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, seasonally adjusted monthly data.

[9] In Alaska, American Job Centers are referred to as the Alaska Job Center Network, or individually, as Job Centers.

spouses eligible for priority of service (POS) differed from other customers at Midtown in that they were considerably more likely to be male (88.4 percent) and tended to be older; 11.0 percent had a service-connected disability. They tended to be older than POS-eligible veterans across Alaska; 54.7 percent of them were age 45 or older compared with 38.7 percent across the state. POS-eligible veterans across the state similarly differed from other customers across the state in that they were considerably more likely to be male and tended to be older. This might be because younger soldiers and airmen tend to ETS[10] and fly back to the lower 48 (the contiguous states), whereas older service members near retirement often choose to do their final tour in Alaska and ETS in place.

B. Local Workforce System

1. Organization

Since 2003, Alaska has been a single Workforce Investment Area with one board that acts as both a state and local Workforce Investment Board (WIB). This was accomplished by combining the previously existing Anchorage/Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) and Balance of State boards. Five regional councils were set up throughout the state to ensure that the local voice was not lost. The Central Region covers Anchorage, Eagle River, and Wasilla; the Coastal/Western Region covers Bethel, Nome, Kotzebue, and Dillingham; the Northern Region contains Fairbanks, Tok, Glenallen, and Barrow; the Peninsula Region encompasses Kenai, Kodiak, Homer, Seward, and Valdez; and the Southeast Region contains Juneau, Ketchikan, and Sitka. The WIB provides policy oversight of state and federally funded job training and vocational education programs and is responsible for overseeing the Alaska Job Centers and administering the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). It is made up of business and industry leaders, as well as Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) and other state staff members.

Nine full-service Job Centers and 13 satellite centers serve the state and are operated by the Alaska DOLWD Division of Employment Security and the WIB. Some are located in relatively dense population centers, but others are in sparsely populated areas. The services available and staffing at the centers varies based on the area served. Centers are administered by the WIB rather than by outside organizations contracted for the task; thus, the staff members are state employees. The majority of Alaska's Job Center system funding is from federal rather than state sources. Efforts are underway to obtain more state funding to avoid difficulties associated with federal funding cycles.

Anchorage, the area chosen for this study, has Job Centers in Midtown and Muldoon, as well as in the neighboring communities of Eagle River and Mat-Su. There is also a youth Job Center, serving those ages 18 to 24, near the career and technical education high school in Anchorage. The centers vary in size and staffing. One individual manages the Muldoon, Eagle River and youth centers, rotating among them according to the day of the week and special events. The Midtown center is the largest and has a full-time manager, as does the Mat-Su center. Midtown has both a full-time local veterans' employment representative (LVER) staff

[10] ETS stands for "Expiration, Term of Service" and is the date at which someone's active duty service is scheduled to end. "To ETS" is a phrase commonly used to mean "to leave the military."

person and Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist and a full complement of other staff members, including business connection staff. It also has a focus on the seafood industry, offering an orientation to employment in the seafood industry and facilitating hiring by it. By comparison, the Eagle River Job Center has six staffers: two employment security specialists, a Division of Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, her assistant, the center manager (two days a week), and an outstationed public assistance staff person two days a week. Within the past year, the Gambell Job Center was closed. This site was downtown and far from residential areas and was run by the public assistance agency. Staff were consolidated at Midtown and Muldoon, reducing costs in a tight budgetary environment, allowing the same population to be served more efficiently, and shifting the focus from public assistance receipt to employment seeking. No customer complaints were received about the closure. Some vacancies were absorbed and, at the time this study was conducted, 15 positions were unfilled for budgetary reasons.

2. Serving Veterans

In 2011, Midtown served almost 30,000 customers, about a fifth of all customers served in Alaska. It served a similar proportion of all veterans, eligible spouses, and transitioning service members, and almost a quarter of all POS-eligible individuals served in the state.

Because of the strong military and veterans' presence in Alaska and the fact that many Job Center staff—not just DVOP and LVER staff—are veterans or are from military families, the desire to serve veterans well is an ethos that permeates the centers. Veterans' representative staff are an integral part of the centers: work spaces are comingled, leading to conversations about how to serve clients; staff are cross trained and familiar with one another's roles, enabling them to help a variety of clients; and there are positive relationships across staff. Every Monday at 8:30 a.m. there is an hour-long all-staff meeting at the Midtown office at which updates are given about ongoing recruitments, upcoming job fairs, and other events. Representatives from different areas (for example, veterans, seafood industry, and employment services) present what they having coming up, what they need help with, and best practices. Partners, such as the Wage and Hour Division, Unemployment Insurance (UI), and educational and training providers, are also invited to brief the staff on the resources they have available. Announcements from various programs and agencies, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), are printed and posted in order to keep everyone informed.

A veterans' program coordinator based in Juneau works across all Job Centers in Alaska to streamline and coordinate the activities and training of veterans' representatives, clarify their roles, organize outreach, improve materials, bring unity to their efforts, and ensure that the Job Center managers are on board with these efforts. He coordinates the activities of the veterans' representatives, but does not directly supervise them; that is the role of their Job Center manager. This is not a new position, but it was vacant briefly before being filled in January 2012. In addition to his veterans' program coordinator duties, this staff person also holds a part-time LVER staff position.

The start of the new veterans' program coordinator coincided with a shift from 13 part-time veterans' representative positions to having 3 full-time DVOP specialists, one full-time LVER staff person, and one part-time DVOP and LVER staff person. Four of the full-time positions are located in Anchorage and one is in Fairbanks. Although the hours dedicated to veterans' representative activities are essentially unchanged under this staffing arrangement, they are

concentrated in the more populous areas where demand is greater. The majority of Alaska's veterans are located in the Anchorage area and they were not being served sufficiently under the part-time representative system, especially during times of high demand. Representatives becoming full-time also increased accountability and eliminated the time and record-keeping difficulties that came with their part-time status. For example, it eliminated the need for dual log-ins to computer systems based on the role taken at any particular time by the representative.

Veterans in outlying areas are served by representatives on itinerant travel; their schedule is undergoing development and refinement. Currently, each of the four full-time veterans' representatives is tasked with visiting three or four outlying sites two or three times a year. At the time of the interviews, one such outreach trip had been conducted. Before the trip, the veterans' representatives used the Alaska Labor Exchange system (ALEXsys), the statewide record-keeping computer system, to pull the records of all veterans in the system in the area to be visited so they could be sent a letter informing them of the visit and encouraging them to make an appointment or come to the center to meet with the traveling representative. The representatives also sent a flyer to be posted in the Job Centers, homeless shelters, and other locations. Before the visit, the itinerant veterans' representative also talked with staff from the receiving center to find out who had made appointments and who else might show up so that he could review their resumes and files in advance and be prepared to meet with them. Of all the appointments made, only two were cancelled, and the visit was considered a success by all involved.

Overall, the response from the now full-time veterans' representatives has been positive, as they feel the shift has increased their ability to serve veterans. Former part-time representatives who are now full-time employment specialists describe essentially continuing their former duties with veterans but under a different title. This is not viewed as a necessarily negative result, as all staff should be able to serve veterans and it makes sense that staff would focus on their particular skill set, though it does cause some staff members concern. As the new staffing plan becomes de rigueur, attention will be paid to whether staff are performing their intended duties or if adjustments are necessary to provide optimal service. At the time of the study interviews, only one quarter of performance data are available and the program is still undergoing modification, so it is too early to make such determinations.

The performance incentive awards authorized under the Jobs for Veterans Act may not be awarded to staff under state procurement regulations. Instead, the winner may choose a charity to which the award is donated on their behalf. Recently, a group of veterans' representatives won and used the award to give bus passes to a Veteran Service Organization (VSO) to be further distributed to veterans who need assistance in getting to job interviews.

3. Processes

Customers have similar experiences at all of the Job Centers. Upon arrival, they are greeted at the front desk and asked to sign in. Several of the individuals who staff the front desk are participants in the MASST program (Mature Alaskans Seeking Skill Training) or have been referred by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). MASST, Alaska's Senior Community Service Employment Program, is for individuals ages 55 and older who work 20 hours a week at minimum wage in positions in which they can gain skills necessary to reenter the workforce. As they are greeted and signing in, customers are asked if they are veterans. Those who identify as veterans are informed of POS, the presence of veterans' representatives, and the services available to them. Depending on their needs and why they are there, customers will then

engage in self-service or staff-assisted activities. Veterans can be served in the resource room, by regular employment services staff, by a veterans' representative, or by some combination of these depending on what best fits the veterans' needs and desires. Because all state employees receive six weeks of leave a year as well as sick leave, and veterans' representatives spend several weeks a year on outreach trips to other Job Centers, a high degree of importance is placed on all staff knowing how and being able to serve veterans.

The Employment Security Division of the Alaska DOLWD is responsible for the UI program in addition to the Alaska Job Center Network. Individuals may submit their initial application for UI and their weekly follow-ups online or by telephone calls to the UI claim center. This is a separate functional area from those performed by staff of the Job Centers, though telephones at the centers can be used for making these calls. UI claimants are required to be registered and have an active resume in ALEXsys, though they are not required to visit a Job Center.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A. Awareness and Usefulness of Federal Guidance

All staff receive formal training on POS when they are hired, including how to identify veterans, what POS entails, and the ways in which it is to be provided. Staff receive additional POS training based on their role and the type and degree of contact they will have with POS-eligible customers. Depending on the site, resource room staff generally receive additional training from the Job Center manager, senior resource room employees, or the regional manager. Similar training is provided by managers in the partners' meetings, to ensure that veterans receive priority even after being referred to other programs. Veterans' representatives hear more about POS at the National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI) and are able to share that knowledge.

The Employment Training Technical (ETT) unit in Juneau puts out an alert to the staff and managers of the Job Centers when a new Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) or other guidance comes out. The alerts are then discussed in staff meetings to ensure understanding and compliance. In the Midtown Center, the manager prints them and places them in a log at the front counter in the resource room. This enables staff who spend much of the day interacting with customers to pick up and read the log as the opportunity arises. Guidance, training materials, notices, forms, definitions, available funds, and other information that has to be disseminated are posted to the state intranet site for staff to access whenever they have questions and for use in training situations. Information on a particular topic, procedure, or protocol can be searched for or the most recent additions can be viewed.

POS is sometimes discussed in staff meetings. Possible scenarios are often discussed, such as what should happen if all of the computers are taken and a veteran comes in to use one. This approach was spoken of positively as it is a more nuts-and-bolts review of what should happen rather than a nebulous, general discussion. Staff seem to obtain most of their information on POS and what they should be doing to implement it from discussions rather than through reading notices. One veterans' representative reported looking for information on POS after being informed of our pending conversation, and finding Training and Employment Notice (TEN) 15-10. He did not recall having seen it before and thought it gave clear, easily understandable detail on aspects of priority that were less familiar to him, such as the eligible spouse criteria. He shared it with all of the other staff of his Job Center, several of whom reported finding it useful.

Familiarity with federal guidance on POS varied somewhat by staff position. Managers gave the impression they had seen more of the actual documents, whereas other staff indicated they heard about POS through less formal means. Most staff and managers feel that they have sufficient knowledge of POS to serve veterans well and the large military and veterans communities provide motivation to do so. Because they are so interested in doing right by veterans, staff and managers welcome additional information when it is provided, as was the case with TEN 15-10.

B. Implementation of POS

1. Veterans' Awareness of POS

Many of the veterans served in Anchorage are older and either did not go through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) or did so long ago that they have forgotten much of what they heard. Those who have left the military recently and, in some cases, their spouses, often are familiar with POS from TAP. The veterans' representative who facilitates the TAP session explains their POS benefits and advises the veterans and spouses that POS applies at American Job Centers in any state. The veterans' representative discusses 24-hour job holds for veterans, priority of seating for workshops, and other POS benefits.

Radio is an important source of information in Alaska, particularly in outlying areas. Several Job Center managers have daily or weekly radio spots during which they talk about upcoming events at the centers, recruitments and job fairs, trends in the local economy, and changes in the programs, such as the H1B visa that will have impacts. POS is also featured in these spots, getting the message out to a broader audience. The message is reinforced at the Job Center whether or not veterans and eligible spouses have been through TAP. Signs on the door to the center and at the front desk explain POS and it is discussed again if customers identify themselves as veterans.

a. Outreach and Referrals

With the shift from part- to full-time veterans' representatives, DVOP and LVER staff now conduct outreach visits to other Job Centers as part of their duties, as described earlier in this appendix. These staff are quite active in several other forms of outreach as well. They participate in the stand-down and quarterly job fairs on base, meet with Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service (VR&E) clients at the VA once a month, coordinate with the Wounded Warrior Battalion, regularly visit the homeless veteran domiciliary, and visit the Homeward Bound shelter. Many of these outreach efforts involve ongoing contact with veterans who have a variety of types and severities of barriers to employment. Veterans' representatives also send daily listings of jobs for veterans to representatives of these organizations and others who would be involved in helping the veterans they serve find work.

The homeless veteran domiciliary runs a three-phase program for its residents; there are 40 to 50 residents at a time, all of whom are men. The first phase deals with any substance abuse issues that might be present. In the second phase, residents go to workshops, develop job-holding skills, create resumes, take computer classes, and other similar activities. They also engage in woodworking activities—building and selling items such as picnic tables—both to develop skills and to raise money to support the organization. The third phase, called comportment, is when the individual is considered job ready and is required to begin a job search. At that point, he begins to work with the DVOP specialist if he so chooses. Residents also come to the Job Center for workshops, recruitment events, and individual meetings with employers.

Once a month, all of the veterans' representatives in the region meet with the VR&E staff at the VA for an hour to an hour-and-a-half to discuss the individuals who are on their case loads directly with the people at VR&E who brought them onboard. They discuss progress, challenges, and plans for the future, as well as best practices, what methods have been successful, and what activities they are conducting. This collaborative relationship is modeled after a successful

example in Montana. Orientation to the VR&E program has been moved to the Muldoon Job Center, to introduce its services and to set the tone that the ultimate goal of the training is employment. After a one hour orientation, veterans meet one-on-one with VA staff and meet with Job Center staff, get registered in ALEXsys, and learn about available services while waiting. If a participant is found ineligible for VR&E, he or she continues receiving Job Center services. After completing training through VR&E, participants are referred to the Job Center. Currently, a VA employee is teaching a class on the federal hiring process at the Job Center, another example of the reciprocal nature of the relationship.

Every Thursday, the Job-X group meets for an hour. Partners from organizations representing veterans (the VA and domiciliary attend regularly), ex-offenders, youth, and other populations meet with human resource and other representatives of employers. The partner organizations give presentations about their programs, network, learn about other resources in the community, and develop relationships with employer representatives that might help to place someone in a job. Often, representatives of workforce organizations will discuss particular individuals they are having difficulty placing, and other participants will give advice and suggest possibilities.

The LVER and Business Connection staffs work together to identify employers who might be interested in hiring a particular veteran. A staff member with a relationship with that employer contacts the employer to describe the individual, as well as any programs such as fidelity bonding, tax credits, and veteran-specific hiring incentives that might be applicable, to try to pave the way for the veteran to apply. The Midtown supervisor has a weekly meeting with the VA and domiciliary, during which they talk about events and opportunities for veterans. Occasionally, employers who have a history or interest in hiring veterans, such as Home Depot, are invited to be a part of the conversation and to plan recruitments.

A new integrated response team initiative with the Wounded Warrior transition unit is modeled after the Disability Employment Initiative (DEI). As injured service members transition out of the military, they generally have a number of people working with them from multiple agencies with little collaboration among them, resulting in considerable duplication of effort, gaps in services, and benefits that preclude receipt of other benefits. The goal of this team is to bring all of the players together so they can work to determine what is needed and how it can best be provided. The employment counselor and the veterans' representative who is the case manager for the individual coordinating the effort contact the representatives who have been identified at each of the different agencies that appear to be involved—perhaps UI, public assistance, the Social Security Administration, vocational rehabilitation, and others. The team comes together and coordinates benefits for the individual so that he or she does not have to go from place to place and attempt to navigate many unfamiliar systems when physical and mental injuries and other major changes likely make this experience more difficult than ever.

Another key aspect of this program is that it involves the whole family. The unit has selected the first participant and he and his family have just begun to receive services from this team. In this family, the veteran has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other issues, the wife has a physical handicap, and their young child has an intellectual disability. The plan is to begin with this family and eventually serve 25 to 35 others this year, while adjusting the program as lessons are learned. All of the Job Center staff have been trained through the DEI grant to be involved in disability initiatives, so if funding is discontinued, it will be possible to duplicate and continue initiatives such as this. The DEI training involves completing a curriculum and online training as

well as a three-month stint as a disability resource coordinator to ensure staff know about the various parts of the initiative and how to serve people with disabilities. All of the staff are completing the basic level of training and some are continuing to more intensive training.

The Job Center receives referrals from various agencies, the military base, and word of mouth. Individuals also come in as a result of something they heard in a radio spot or read in one of the electronic mailing list messages. These two methods of communication target job seekers and employers. They give the Job Centers an opportunity to highlight what they are doing, which often can bring the job seekers and employers together. For example, during some times of the year, they will recruit hundreds of people for seafood processors to go out for the salmon and herring seasons.

Job fairs, for all job seekers and specifically for veterans, are held regularly. A recent Hiring our Heroes veterans' job fair in Anchorage brought together 135 employers and 1,500 to 2,000 veterans. The Job Centers teamed with the U.S. and Alaska Chambers of Commerce, the University of Alaska, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, and local businesses to organize and carry out the event. Businesses are eager to provide support such as facilities, advertising, and transportation, and employers report finding some of their highest quality applicants there. This year, the Mat-Su Job center altered the format of its annual job fair to be an employer expo, which allowed employers without current openings to participate. A VSO sponsored a hospitality room for veteran attendees to have refreshments during the event.

During layoff situations, the Job Center rapid response team meets with affected employees at their work site to talk about UI and describe the services available at the Job Center.

b. TAP

Until October 2011, veterans' representatives taught the three-day TAP classes at JBER. A private vendor now teaches the bulk of the course, with the veterans' representatives giving a presentation lasting about an hour-and-a-half on the services offered by the Job Centers, what POS is, and that veterans will be eligible for POS and similar services no matter where they move. Initial feedback from clients and TAP coordinators on the base has been somewhat negative, but there is an understanding that the vendor has been doing it for only three months and that the vendor will likely improve with time and experience.

c. Media and Signage

Alaska is one of two states in this study in which interviews were conducted by telephone rather than in person. For this reason, staff members provided descriptions of the site during telephone interviews and sent photographs afterward. Based on these sources, the Midtown Job Center has clear signage on the door, in the reception area, and elsewhere notifying customers of POS. The signs are in color, with a large flag and the emblems of the services, and use large type. They advise spouses who are unsure of their eligibility status to ask about the requirements. Staff indicated that the reception area signage and greeting of customers helps to speed identification of POS-eligible veterans and spouses.

Bulletin boards targeting various populations of interest also provide easily visible information. Boards are specific to veterans, apprenticeships, public assistance, and vocational rehabilitation. Flags of each service hang over the three veterans' computers and the veterans'

representatives often have the flags of their branch and other items in their office spaces. The visual effect seems that it would let veterans know they are valued and welcomed.

2. POS Procedures

When customers visit the Job Center, staff at the front desk greet them, ask them to sign in, and ask if the customer is a veteran. The sign-in sheet also asks the customer to indicate whether he or she is a veteran, registered in ALEXsys, a UI claimant, and if he or she has an appointment. If the veteran is not registered in ALEXsys, the veteran is informed of his or her right to POS and what it entails. In addition, an initial registration form is completed to collect demographic, educational attainment, employment history, military service, displaced worker status, presence of a disability, and other information that helps the staff member determine who the customer should see or complete information that is necessary for record keeping.

A customer who wishes to simply use a computer for job search or other self-service activities is directed to the resource room. Those who have POS are seen first. If needed, a staff member might also direct the person to the copy or fax machine or telephone. Most customers seeking staff-assisted services will see the next available Wagner-Peyser staff member and can use the resource room in the meantime if there is a wait. POS-eligible customers are initially served by resource room or Wagner-Peyser staff unless they specifically request to work with a veterans' representative or it is clear that they have needs best addressed by a veterans' representative. Veterans' representatives can be specifically requested by customers who had initial contact with them during TAP, a stand-down, at the domiciliary, during other outreach events, or who heard of them by word of mouth. DVOP specialists primarily act as case managers and LVER staff primarily act as liaisons to the business community who develop job listings. In working with a customer and developing a service plan, a need for training might mean that the customer is referred to WIA services.

A customer who claims to be a veteran or POS-eligible spouse is taken at his or her word when registering in person or in ALEXsys. Such customers are given priority and access to veterans' representatives as soon as they make that statement. The exception is those whose discharge was dishonorable. Those individuals do not receive POS and are treated the same as the general population. Because registration in ALEXsys is the first step undertaken when a customer meets with a staff member if it has not already been completed, the topic of discharge type is guaranteed to be raised. Some veterans, especially those who are separating or have done so recently, will bring their form DD-214 to the Job Center with them and veteran status can be confirmed at that time. Others might not present it until proof of eligibility is required for a particular program. If a veteran or spouse does not have the DD-214, all staff members are able to help them request one. Veterans' representatives are most likely to do this, but if they are not available when needed, any staff member can pick up a copy of the step-by-step procedures from a folder on the wall by the DVOP specialist's office.

POS–eligible veterans have first access to services, workshops, and trainings for which they and ineligible clients are equally qualified. They also benefit from 24-hour job holds. If a session is scheduled for the small conference room, which is set up for 10 people, and a POS-eligible customer wants to sign up after capacity is reached or there are more participants than there is capacity, either chairs will be added or the session will be moved to the large conference room. None of the individuals interviewed could remember a time when a customer had to be bumped from a session due to capacity constraints.

Three additional computers are designated for veterans' use only. These are outside of the general resource room area, behind the reception desk. The area is quieter, less crowded, less trafficked, and potentially less stressful for those with PTSD. Because of its proximity to both the front desk and where the veterans' representatives sit, staff members are more accessible to customers in this area who need help or who have questions. Computers in the conference room are also available, if the room is not being used for WorkKeys[11] testing or other purposes, to veterans who need or want a particularly quiet environment or when all other computers are in use.

On the veteran services webpage, veterans are able to send questions or comments directly to an expert in the central office. He then responds and/or directs the message to the proper person in the field for response and follow-up. This direct communication channel is a service only provided to individuals registered as veterans and there is no counterpart for the general public. Popular television shows and other media have generated interest in moving to Alaska and finding work driving trucks or on seafood boats on arrival. The AJCs field numerous emails from individuals interested in doing this or with other vague plans for moving to Alaska. Most of these receive a standard response directing them to online resources. Emails from veterans who are out of state and are interested in moving back to Alaska and finding a job, particularly those who were stationed in Alaska or who have family there, receive extra information and are put in touch with a veterans' representative.

3. Self-Service Materials and Systems

About 25 computers, printers, copiers, fax machines, a scanner, and telephones are available for use by customers. Veterans (and other customers) can use the public-access computers to register with ALEXsys and begin their job searches. Other tools on the self-service computers include resume builders; skill and interest assessments; typing trainers and tests; Career Ready 101 training to prepare for the WorkKeys test; orientations such as for seafood recruitments and vocational rehabilitation; and hotlinks to USAJOBS, Workplace Alaska, and private job boards. Many of the resources can be accessed from anywhere, but some, such as orientations, which require meeting with a staff member to get a referral afterwards, can be accessed only from the Job Center.

Although job search, resume building, and other activities can be completed in ALEXsys over the Internet without going to a Job Center, staff indicated that it is preferable for several reasons that customers, particularly veterans, come in for a meeting. Veterans' representatives can assist in developing a better resume than one generated through ALEXsys, they have relationships with employers and might be able to facilitate obtaining an interview for a customer, they have experience in translating military skill sets for the civilian market, and they can acquaint the customer with the many other available services.

[11] WorkKeys is a skills assessment system that can be used to measure skill levels in particular areas, identify areas where training is needed, and determine if an individual has the capabilities necessary for a particular job.

4. Customer Service and Reporting Systems

The ALEXsys is the comprehensive, statewide job search, data collection, case management, and reporting method for the state's workforce system. It is part of the Alaska DOLWD and is a "Virtual OneStop" product created by Geographic Solutions, a firm that operates such sites for many states. Participants and staff can enter data into the system and complete activities appropriate to their roles. Some activities completed by customers while logged into the system are automatically recorded in the customer's record; others must be input by a staff member. Staff can generate reports to manage caseloads, monitor performance, and track services provided. Standard reports that meet reporting requirements for Wagner-Peyser, WIA, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) and other federal programs are part of the package and are kept up to date as reporting requirements change.

Customers can create an account in ALEXsys and access it via the Internet and at any Job Center in the state. To determine eligibility for POS and various veterans' programs, specific questions are asked about military experience; service dates; nature of discharge (honorable, dishonorable, and other); service-connected disability rating; and eligibility for a campaign medal. The categories that qualify as eligible spouses are shown and customers can select one if it applies to them.

Registered customers are able to specify characteristics of the job they want, such as occupation, geographic area, salary requirements, and working conditions, when conducting a job search in ALEXsys. Clicking on a job description and the more detailed information on the position alerts the UI system that the individual has conducted required job search activities to continue receiving benefits if he or she receives them. It also creates a record of who has looked at the position that the employer can view. If the employer is interested in the individual, the employer can send the person a message in ALEXsys or contact the person using the information provided on the resume. Similarly, individuals see a count of how many employers have viewed their resume.

Just as customers can conduct searches of jobs, employers who have posted job openings in ALEXsys can search the resumes of registered customers. Employers can target their searches for various characteristics. They cannot currently search specifically for veterans, but a request for this functionality has been submitted. Employers are currently able to see an indicator of veterans' status for each of the job seekers they view.

Job orders are accessible only to veterans and eligible spouses for the first 24 hours. Veterans' representatives often email job openings that match the skills and qualifications of particular clients to them. There are also several electronic mailing lists that automatically send job listings fitting certain parameters to a distribution list of customers for whom they would be appropriate.

Staff track all services provided to customers in ALEXsys to fulfill reporting requirements and ensure that individual customers are effectively served regardless of where they register and which Job Centers they visit. All services received by a customer and activities in which he or she has engaged are visible to staff at any Job Center, easing transitions from site to site. ALEXsys is designed to produce all of the federally required reports. It can also be used to generate special reports on a regular or ad hoc basis. One such frequently used report is a listing of everyone who has not accessed services recently, perhaps in the past 90 days. Telephone calls

are then made to those people to reconnect and find out if they are still in need of services. When the customer has ceased contact because he or she has found employment, the caller tries to obtain information about the new job. Those who have not found employment are encouraged to return to the Job Center to reinvigorate their search. Veterans' representatives regularly conduct such follow-up with customers who have been out of contact, though they tend to make the contacts through email.

Weekly reports are due to the regional manager and a quarterly report is due to the veterans' coordinator in Juneau. In addition to data, both of these reports include success stories about individuals who have found employment, their employers, what the customers are earning, and who they worked with from the Job Center and partner agencies. Some of the success stories are forwarded to the commissioner's office, where they might be featured on the state website. (No identifying information about the individual is revealed.)

Some flaws in the reporting system have been found and staff are working toward solutions. For example, if a veterans' representative worked with a customer living in Alaska who found a job in the lower 48 states for which he or she then relocated, the staff member did not receive credit for working with that veteran, which could affect funding. Many of the veterans' representatives keep their own Excel databases of their customers, often with detailed color-coding schemes to indicate the individual's status. This is useful for ease of sorting by occupational interest, course enrollment, and similar characteristics and because email addresses from the sorted list can be copied and pasted into the blind copy field of an email message, quickly getting it out to everyone who needs to see it.

Individual staff members receive feedback on their performance based on monthly and quarterly reports. They might find out that they are using an inappropriate code for a particular activity or not entering notes correctly, for example. Particularly high or low numbers of customers served or an odd distribution of services might be discussed. The feedback is considered to be constructive and oriented to quality.

C. Translation of Military Experience and Skills

Staff and managers unequivocally describe their Job Centers as highly skilled at translating military experience to civilian terminology. Individuals interviewed really seemed to enjoy that aspect of their jobs—those with a military background because they felt it was a skill that enabled them to help people, and those without a military background because they get to learn something new. Some staff who are very familiar with the terminology in the branch in which they served enjoyed learning the comparable terms used in other branches.

The most frequent approach used by staff when customers have difficulty describing in civilian terms what they have done in the military or when their resume is full of military terminology is to ask the customer a series of questions that lead to identifying a set of civilian descriptors. Sometimes customers resist this approach because they know the staff member has a military background and understands, but staff members explain that the human resources representatives they speak with will not understand and that they have to become practiced in giving civilian language descriptions. Staff also help by suggesting appropriate terms and encouraging customers to more broadly describe their activities so the skill sets used can be identified and carried over to the civilian world. Many of the veterans' representatives and other staff members know the military occupational specialty codes that customers often use to define

their jobs but, in cases when they do not, they engage resources such as O*NET, CareerInfoNet, and other online translators. They also use these tools when customers are unable to describe their occupation sufficiently well for the staff member to understand it. In this case, the staff member will often pull up occupations that seem similar and they can go through the various characteristics of the occupations, discussing what the customer did and did not do until they reach clarity. Staff also collaborate with one another during the translation process, perhaps discussing with someone who is more familiar with the military in general, that branch, or that particular field of work.

The Midtown Job Center maintains a library of books on military-to-civilian transitions, rewriting resumes accordingly, and the proper words to use based on what type of job a person seeks. Staff can also show customers various websites that translate military jobs and skills to civilian terms and that list civilian occupations a person might be well suited for based on his or her military occupation.

D. Challenges in Implementing POS

Implementation of POS does not appear to be a challenge in Anchorage. The environment is very pro-veteran and military friendly, and staff uniformly express a desire to go above and beyond for veterans. POS seems to be viewed as a helpful tool able to give veterans the quality of service they are seen as deserving. Wagner-Peyser staff consistently serve veterans and those who visit the Anchorage Job Centers are not sent directly to a veterans' representative unless they ask for one or need that skill set.

The new arrangement of stationing full-time veterans' representatives in the more populous Job Centers and visiting the outlying satellites several times a year is clearly an attempt to better serve veterans by having more DVOP and LVER staff available in areas with the highest need. However, this approach is still in the early stage of implementation and cannot yet be assessed.

Spouses of veterans who do not meet the requirements for POS eligibility were often unaware of those requirements and identified themselves as eligible for services. Time and careful conversation were necessary to explain to these individuals that they were not, in fact, eligible. Some were thankful after understanding the events that would make them eligible, whereas others were upset that they would not receive something they thought they were due. ALEXsys has recently been reworked to list the spousal eligibility requirements one by one and ask if the customer meets them. This should streamline the process and cause less frustration, because spouses will be less inclined to feel that something is being wrongly withheld from them. Because the change had been in place for only about a month at the time of the interview, it is too soon to assess its effectiveness.

E. Promising Practices in POS Implementation

Promising practices identified in Alaska and discussed throughout this report include the following:

- Promising practices to improve POS procedures:
  - Recent addition of each of the four eligible spouse criteria to ALEXsys

  - Ready access to guidances, training materials, forms, and other materials in a binder at the front desk and on the state intranet site
  - Ability to send questions or comments through a webpage to a veterans expert in the central office who then forwards the message to the appropriate individual for response
  - Strong veterans' program coordinator who focuses on both the big picture and details
  - New outreach to outlying sites and intent to adjust the program based on lessons learned from initial attempts
  - Weekly all-staff meeting and other connections between different types of staff
  - Strong networking of LVER staff and Business Connection staff with employers
  - Integrated resource team organizing wrap-around services to veterans and families
  - Comingled and cross-trained staff who are able to assist a variety of clients and share information with each other
  - Designated veterans' computers and area in a calm environment with ready access to staff
  - Participation in job fairs on base and stand downs, meetings with VR&E at the VA, involvement with the Wounded Warrior Battalion, veterans domiciliary, and Homeward Bound shelter
  - 24 hour job holds. Ability of employers to see an indicator of veteran status on job seeker profiles. Plan to allow employers to search by veteran status.

- Promising practices to improve veterans' awareness of POS:
  - Signage in reception area
  - Radio shows
  - Comprehensive outreach to domiciliary and other locations
  - Strong interaction with VA
  - Recent addition of each of the four eligible spouse criteria to ALEXsys

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Further Guidance and Dissemination of Guidance

Alaska staff suggested it would be beneficial to augment guidance with an in-person training conducted by someone who knows all of the intricacies of POS and can answer questions about exactly how to implement the guidance. Otherwise, many individuals are left mulling over the written guidance to determine what it means and how they think it is intended to be implemented.

It was also noted that word of upcoming changes and new guidance often gets out well before the details are available and by the time that details are made available, the implementation timetable is sometimes short. If possible, longer implementation times are preferable, particularly if the details of the requirements are known in advance.

Although information on POS might be available on the intranet site, staff do not seem to take advantage of this resource. More often, they described looking at the same state website that the public uses to get information on programs and finding it lacking for their needs. The reasons contributing to staff's lack of use of the intranet site and other resources should be investigated so the causes can be addressed and staff can access the detailed information intended for them.

As mentioned earlier, not all staff were familiar with TEN 15-10 but when they saw it, they found it very useful. It has the straightforward description of what to do to implement POS and vernacular language that many of the staff members described as how they would like to see guidance presented. Better dissemination of this TEN to AJC staff is recommended to address staff and management concerns and improve comprehension of POS. The tenor and format of this TEN provide a beneficial model for the development of future guidance.

B. Outreach and Veterans' Services

A common recommendation was to hire additional veterans' representatives. Now that fewer individuals are filling these positions full-time compared with the earlier model of more individuals filling them on a part-time basis, some Job Centers will have only occasional access to veterans' representatives. Some staff wonder if this will result in sufficient service in the outlying areas. There was also some concern that individuals who were previously part-time veterans' representatives in these areas and are still there but with other titles will essentially be carrying out their prior duties out of necessity.

Plans are under development to renovate the Midtown Job Center, removing some of the offices at the front and increasing the size of the resource room and number of computers available. This is important because the room is often crowded and the computers full. Several staff members expressed a hope that a separate area for veterans would be created, with additional veterans-only computers and more opportunity for staff to directly assist customers. At the time of the interviews, how the space would be used was unknown to the staff.

The current sign-in sheet completed by customers visiting Job Centers asks if the customer is a veteran but does not ask if he or she is an eligible spouse. Eligible spouses are found infrequently, likely due to their rarity but also possibly due to lack of knowledge about them or

the benefit to disclosing such status. More commonly, people who are not eligible identify themselves as eligible. Asking on the sign-in sheet if an individual meets any of the specific criteria for spousal eligibility, as is now done in ALEXsys, could help ameliorate both of these issues.

APPENDIX E

STUDY SITE PROFILE: GOLDEN SIERRA, CALIFORNIA

I. DESCRIPTION OF STUDY SITE

A. Population and Local Area Description

California has the largest population of the 50 states, with about 37,691,912 inhabitants. Of the total population, 28,424,797 people, or 75.4 percent, are ages 18 or older. The median age is 35.4 years. About 1,910,994 people, or 6.7 percent of the adult population, are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. By race, 62.9 percent of all Californians are white, 6.0 percent are black, 13.2 percent are Asian, and the rest are of other races. Hispanics, who can be of any race, make up 38.1 percent of the population of California. Of Californians ages 25 and older, 11.1 percent have earned a graduate or professional degree, 19.2 percent have a bachelor's degree, 7.7 percent have an associate's degree, and 21.1 percent graduated from high school or have an equivalency certificate or degree.[12]

As of April 2012, the unemployment rate in California was 10.9 percent, higher than the national unemployment rate of 8.1 percent but lower than the rate in California a year earlier, 11.8 percent.[13] In the past decade, unemployment in California held at around 6 to 7 percent from 2002 through 2004 before declining to around 5 percent for much of 2006 and 2007. It then rose steadily and peaked at 12.4 percent in the middle of 2010. Since then, it has shown a steady decline.[14]

Air Force Base (AFB) Beale is about 40 miles north of Sacramento and covers 23,000 acres. The host unit of the base, the 9th Reconnaissance Wing, is assigned to the Air Combat Command Eighth Air Force and is equipped with the nation's fleet of U-2s and RQ-4s. Because the base houses much of the most technologically advanced equipment and aircraft in the U.S. Air Force, it is a training ground for that equipment and several specialized fields. It is undergoing downsizing that is expected to affect 3,000 positions by the end of 2013.

AFB McClellan, which closed in 2001 following the Base Realignment and Closure mandate of 1995, was located in Sacramento and had operated since 1935. During its operation, the U.S. Air Force used the base as its logistics center and performed maintenance on its aircraft and military vehicles there. The base was home to several military commands throughout its tenure, including the Air Force Material Command, Air Force Logistics Command, the Material Division of the U.S. Army Air Corps., Air Service Command, and Army Air Forces Technical Service Command. The United States Coast Guard's military aviation unit was also located there. Since its closure, the base has been converted into the McClellan Airport, which is publicly accessible and is the site of the Aerospace Museum of California. The museum displays 40 fully restored aircraft and 60 pieces of original artwork.

[12] U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, Tables DP02, DP03, and DP05.

[13] Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, seasonally adjusted monthly data.

[14] Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Regional and State Employment and Unemployment, April 2012–May 18, 2012.

B. Local Workforce System

1. Organization

The California Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA) is the statewide organization responsible for workforce policy and oversight. Members of the state workforce investment board (WIB), the California Workforce Investment Board, are appointed by the governor; these members represent many different sectors of the economy, including business, labor, higher education, and the legislature. There are 49 regional WIBs across the state administering federally funded job training and employment programs and developing local internal policies. Most regions are made up of single counties, but some are consortiums consisting of multiple counties. The regional WIBs operate and staff more than 200 American Job Centers (AJCs) of varying size. The LWDA's California Employment Development Department (EDD) Workforce Services Branch links California's state and local workforce services and resources and maintains a website that provides information targeted to job seekers, employers, and workforce partners. Sections of the site tailored for each of these groups and to their subgroups direct customers to topics of interest and resources they seek. Individuals interested in jobs or training are linked to state and federal job search websites and provided information on self-assessment, career exploration, resume development, job fairs, training providers and funding sources, labor market information, and Unemployment Insurance benefits.

At the time of the site visit, AJCs in many regions were called One-Stop Career Centers. Some regions used different names, however; WorkSource Centers, Workforce Services offices or centers, and Job Connection are common examples. Often, a regional brand is used in conjunction with these terms, as is the case in Golden Sierra, where the term Connections One-Stop is generally part of the name of the sites. In the past, each center in a region might have had a different name, a situation that caused confusion and made it difficult for the public to know where to find services. As one staff member put it, "They didn't even know where to look in the phone book." The development of common branding within regions is viewed as beneficial, but differences still exist across regions. The cross-region differences are not regarded as a real hindrance and there is hesitation among some staff members to unifying them given the effort that has gone into creating them and developing brand recognition. Staff fear a change would leave the public unsure of where to seek services, and suggest keeping regional taglines should a common state or federal brand be developed.

The Golden Sierra Consortium of AJCs, operated by the Golden Sierra WIB, is the area chosen for this study. The consortium was formed in 1983 and now covers Placer, El Dorado, and Alpine counties. Within the consortium, the Golden Sierra Job Training Agency is responsible for providing Workforce Investment Act (WIA) services and operating the AJCs and EDD generally provides Wagner-Peyser services. Comprehensive AJCs are located in Auburn, Roseville, Placerville, and South Lake Tahoe. Operation of the Placerville and South Lake Tahoe locations in El Dorado County, and provision of WIA services there is contracted out, generally to the Department of Human Services. Those sites do not have EDD representation; EDD no longer operates stand-alone offices, so if there is not both a partnership with the regional operator and the ability to be located in the AJC, EDD will not be in the area. Customers at these sites who would benefit from seeing a veterans' representative, for example, are referred to one of the sites in Placer County. Alpine County is a seasonal area whose two main employers outside of the government are ski resorts. It is the smallest county in California, with a population of 1,100;

Placer County is one of the fastest-growing counties in the country, led by considerable growth in the technology sector.

The AJCs in Auburn and Roseville were visited for this study. In them, Golden Sierra and EDD staff work closely and are indistinguishable to customers; their name tags do not identify the entity for which they work. Although staff of each organization are responsible for services under different programs (e.g., WIA and Wagner-Peyser), they work together to exchange information, answer each other's questions, teach each other about new programs and procedures, and serve customers. One staff member described the center as a "family environment," a place where staff want to help other staff members. When staff of one agency are away from the office to administer a grant or conduct off-site workshops, staff of the other agency are able to fill that gap temporarily so service to customers is not interrupted.

Other partners and programs vary by AJC and include Experience Works, a nonprofit entity operating in Placer and 22 other northern California counties providing training to low-income seniors; the NorCal Center on Deafness, a nonprofit organization with staff in the Roseville AJC (and other places) offering job search, training, skill development, interpreting, and other services to deaf or hard-of-hearing customers; Business Connections and the California Employers Association, which provide services to employers, including a human resources hotline and workshops; and ProNet, a facilitated networking forum held weekly at the Auburn and Roseville AJCs for unemployed professionals.

EDD receives federal funding for WIA and allocates it to the regions and their operators according to a formula. Golden Sierra administers an annual budget of about $6.5 million of WIA formula funds and rapid response and other grants. In three quarters of the 2011 program year, Golden Sierra AJCs served 15,178 distinct customers. Placerville served the most, 6,122, followed by Auburn, 4,287; Roseville, 2,425; and South Lake Tahoe, 2,344.

2. Serving Veterans

Both EDD and Golden Sierra staff and directors expressed their commitment to serving veterans; a considerable share of them are veterans themselves. Some veterans' representatives and directors have long tenures, providing institutional knowledge, stability, and a strong resource for newer staff. Staff report that priority of service (POS) has always been given and that they do not remember a time without it. In recent years, local forms and procedures have been developed to ensure that all necessary questions are asked to identify veterans and eligible spouses and that POS is provided without fail. It has also become a regularly covered item in staff training and discussion topic during meetings.

Five veterans' representative EDD staff service the Golden Sierra Consortium, one Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist in the Auburn office and one Local Veteran's Employment Representative (LVER) staff and three DVOP specialists in the Roseville office. All are full-time employees. There is a clear division of responsibilities between the DVOP and LVER staff. DVOP specialists focus on providing services to customers by means of an initial veterans' assessment, determining their job-ready status, building civilian resumes and interview skills, case management, making referrals to other needed services, and considering the veteran for training; the LVER staff person, on the other hand, focuses on outreach to employers and others in the community, building rapport and developing connections with employers and others, and encouraging employers to actively participate in activities of the AJC. Veterans'

representative staff members reported that they collaborate with one another and with other staff members to best serve their clients. Staff know about one another's backgrounds and fields of expertise, and have customers interested in those fields talk with those individuals, when possible. Veterans' representatives work in a team-oriented environment and talk to each other about customers and questions as the need arises in addition to during the scheduled office staff meetings.

Staff target the population of veterans in Golden Sierra for outreach in several ways. The LVER staff person routinely reaches out to employers, colleges, and nonprofits in the community to inform them about the benefits of hiring veterans. He gives presentations to veterans' service organizations (VSOs) and other groups likely to come in contact with veterans in need of their services. For example, the LVER staff person attends a monthly meeting with representatives of all of the VSOs to tell them about what is going on at the AJCs and ask them to refer any job- or training-seeking veterans they encounter. The LVER staff person also seeks out veterans themselves at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities, the County Veterans Service Office (CVSO), veteran clubs in the colleges, job fairs, and VSOs. Each month, a manager runs a report from which DVOP specialists contact veterans newly registered in CalJobs, the state's job search website, to inform them of the services available and encourage them to visit the AJC. The California Department of Veterans Affairs sends reintegration survey forms completed during the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) by transitioning service members who indicate they are interested in information or services related to employment to the AJCs. DVOP specialists also contact those individuals to offer services and invite them to the AJC. In the past, DVOP specialists attempted street level outreach to homeless people, but this is no longer done as resistance to receiving services was encountered and there was a very low level of success. Staff continue to participate in stand-downs, which facilitate outreach to homeless veterans who desire services.

Two special programs that target veterans are worth noting. First, the VetNet program, developed by staff in the Roseville Center, consists of a cohort of 12 to 15 veterans who move through an eight-week curriculum together. The fourth cohort was completing the program at the time of the site visit. The modules cover topics such as resume writing, job search techniques, skill translation, interviewing and working in a civilian environment, use of online tools, and employers' perspectives on resumes and cover letters. Participants are required to dress professionally, participate fully, and maintain confidentiality. They are actively involved in putting what they learn into practice, giving feedback on one another's resumes, critiquing performance in mock interviews, and pointing out mannerisms that are likely to be off-putting to an employer. Giving feedback reinforces the things to be mindful of and receiving feedback from peers elevates its salience to the recipient. Networking and interacting with employers are also emphasized. Staff who are involved with VetNet reported that participants bond, become quite open with one another about their experiences and employment or readjustment difficulties, and form a support network as they go through the job search process. That all participants are veterans and have a degree of unity through common experience and understanding is key to this program being as successful as it has been. VetNet has boosted morale among veterans in the center and has greatly increased the share of veterans who become employed, from about 8.5 to 63 percent. Staff and veterans alike reported being happy with the program. Some participants do not complete the eight-week program, usually because they have found employment. Staff could recall only one participant who was asked to stop attending. Because of the program's success in

the Roseville Center, a decision has been made to roll this program out more widely, first to the regional level and then to the division.

Second, the WIB applied for and was chosen as part of the services group for a three-year federal Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grant for which the state applied. This grant focuses on coordination among disability service providers and involves a commitment to become an Employment Network through the Ticket-to-Work program, which is a program through the Social Security Administration that encourages disability beneficiaries to seek employment services so they may become employed or increase their earnings and that gives ENs outcome based financial incentives to serve them. The grant requires the WIB to serve a certain number of people with disabilities, and they have decided to target disabled veterans while also serving others with disabilities. The WIB will receive its full request of about $625,000 over the course of the three-year grant.

Some staff members find veterans more difficult to serve than other customers, whereas other staff members do not perceive a difference. Some report that some veterans seem to have higher expectations of the staff and think that when they provide their background information, resumes, and other materials, they simply need to wait and the AJC staff will find a job for them. Staff also feel that some veterans lack a realistic understanding of the jobs and salaries available in the civilian world and have expectations that are too high.

Most of the veterans served in Golden Sierra are older—that is, older than 40—but an increasing share are younger veterans. The older veterans seem to be more aware of the AJC and the services it has to offer; the younger veterans seem less aware and less likely to accept offers of assistance, possibly because they plan to attend school and work part-time.

Some of the veterans served in Golden Sierra have barriers to employment such as addiction issues, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and physical or psychological injuries. Although they recognize that the center is not a therapy unit, staff try to recognize signs that other services may benefit veterans and connect them with those services. Veterans exhibiting addiction issues are referred to people at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) or American Legion who are equipped to help or are referred to VA for treatment. In an effort to set them up for success rather than failure, Golden Sierra prefers customers to be clean and sober for six months so they are job-ready before enrolling them in funded training activities. Veterans' representatives and their managers seem to go above and beyond what is required to provide services to veterans with service-connected disabilities. Not only do they try to arrange to involve the necessary service providers, but they will work with these disabled veterans more intensively and over a longer period. They have been known to do such things as use their own networks to recommend veterans for jobs, get a person quickly involved with the Wounded Warrior Project, and talk to a veteran's mother to help her adjust and function in a more productive role with her child.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A. Awareness and Usefulness of Federal Guidance

All AJC staff receive training on POS when they are initially hired, which includes studying the federal guidance. Staff meetings are held every two months in the AJCs and POS is occasionally a topic here as well. At other times, topics include new or changed policies or procedures, new programs, internal policies, and site and safety issues. Much of the POS-related training Golden Sierra staff receive is conducted on the job. EDD staff members praised the training they receive from the division on POS and other topics. The veterans' representatives also receive training at the National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI) in Denver, Colorado, on case management, counseling, POS, and other topics. Veterans' representatives routinely remind nonveterans' representative staff of the POS procedures and EDD managers are responsible for informing staff of any changes to POS. All staff say that they and others have a good understanding of POS and how to implement it.

Most staff members asked were familiar with the federal guidance on POS and knew where to find answers to their questions. Some staff members indicated that they refer to their copy of the guidance for answers, whereas others use the Veteran Service Manual to locate needed information. To reinforce staff members' training, management developed this manual to serve as a reference guide for staff. Staff also ask veterans' representatives and senior staff members when they have outstanding questions.

The state government publishes Internal Administrative Notices (IANs) which interpret federal guidance (Training and Employment Guidance Letters [TEGLs], Veterans' Program Letters [VPLs], Training and Employment Notices [TENs]) and instruct staff on how to implement the guidance. These IANs are circulated to the AJCs via email. Although the state guidance mirrors the federal guidance, AJC staff found the IANs more useful because they are easier to read and are circulated more often. In these notices, the state provides background on the issues and explains the policy, referencing the federal guidance when applicable. Recently, the state began to include a section with questions it had received and its responses on the premise that if one site had a question, others likely would as well. The responsibility for discussing the IANs falls on AJC managers, who are expected to hold meetings to discuss the latest directives from the state and to ensure that all staff understand the latest changes.

B. Implementation of POS

1. Veterans' Awareness of POS

Because veterans cannot be assumed to have knowledge of POS or the need to identify themselves upon entering an AJC, they are immediately greeted and asked if they are veterans. If so, they are assisted by a veterans' service navigator (VSN), who is an EDD employee, from that point forward.

a. Outreach and Referrals

Staff members, especially the LVER and the AJC's Business Connections staff, undertake many outreach efforts to employers to educate them about the services available through the

Golden Sierra Consortium and its partner agencies and the advantages of hiring veterans. LVER staff also visit veterans' organizations and others who might come in contact with job-seeking veterans to inform them of the services of the AJC, distribute business cards, and encourage them to refer job-seeking veterans. Outreach efforts to veterans are focused on places with a marked population of veterans, including VA hospitals, community colleges, stand-downs, and job fairs. In the workshops for veterans, staff encourage attendees to spread the word to other veterans they know. Another relationship that the site fosters is with the CVSO; the veterans' representatives work very closely with and receive referrals from them often. The California Department of Veterans' Affairs also refers customers to the AJC for services.

Although Golden Sierra currently conducts some outreach via social media, they do not post enough content on a continuous basis to stay relevant in the social media sphere. Due to their inexperience with social media, they have hired a private marketing firm to assist with developing a social media outreach and networking plan, improving awareness of the AJCs, and generating support. The marketing firm was slated to begin work about a week after the site visit.

b. TAP

Veterans' representatives in the area are no longer involved in teaching TAP. A TAP coordinator at the division level of EDD assigns division staff who are TAP instructors to conduct sessions on military bases across the state to help separating service members transition to civilian life. In these sessions, TAP instructors inform veterans of their POS benefits and the services available to them in the AJCs. Instructors begin the process of assisting the veterans to become job-ready by working on their resumes and interviewing skills and refer them to the AJC to further work with veterans' representatives to complete the process. It is expected that TAP will be contracted out or privatized in 2013 and that EDD will no longer have a role in it.

c. Media and Signage

Both the Auburn and Roseville AJCs have readily noticeable displays of veteran-oriented materials in their public areas. These generally consist of a bulletin board or other wall-mounted materials with a bookcase of binders, books, flyers, and other resources below. The front desk also has informative pamphlets about job search and veterans' POS. Flyers are posted detailing the POS eligibility criteria for veterans and spouses.

All AJC staff are encouraged to assist customers in developing social media competency to aid their networking and job search. In addition, staff members are encouraged to have their own LinkedIn accounts to assist in customers' networking and so they can show customers how LinkedIn works, the benefits of using it, and how it can assist them, with the ultimate goal of getting customers to create and use their own LinkedIn accounts.

2. POS Procedures

When a customer first visits the AJC, he or she completes a sign-in slip that asks if the person is new to the career center, if he or she is a veteran, and why the person is there. If the customer is there simply to use the Unemployment Insurance telephone, he or she is directed to it; but if the customer is interested in job or training information or services, front desk staff verify the customer's right-to-work documents and registers him or her in CalJobs and on connectioncenters.com, which is also called Virtual One Stop (VOS) and is a Golden Sierra

system. First-time customers receive a swipe card to use to sign in each time they return for services. At the front desk, the customer swipes the card on a touch-screen computer, which brings up a menu of services from which the customer selects his or her reasons for visiting the center. Some options include case management, VetNet, and ProNet. After being issued a swipe card, the customer receives a tour of the center and information on the center's rules and regulations. Staff also provide a monthly workshop calendar and encourage the customer to sign up for these sessions. POS and the resources available are explained to veterans and they are introduced to a DVOP specialist whenever possible to reinforce that there are staff members specially designated and trained to work with veterans.

If a customer identifies as a veteran, he or she is assisted by a VSN and asked to complete a veterans' intake sheet. This sheet asks about the veteran's branch and dates of service, presence and rating of a service-connected disability, military and civilian occupations, and educational attainment. In conversation with the veteran, the VSN completes a need-based assessment covering barriers to employment, job readiness, other issues that need to be addressed, and services that would be useful. Based on the information collected on these intake forms, veterans who meet the eligibility criteria for case management are referred to a DVOP specialist. Others requiring less-intensive services are served by other EDD staff. Some veterans receive referrals to other agencies that can work on issues that prevent them from being job–ready, such as homelessness or addiction, or help them receive benefits for which they are eligible. This needs determination step is taken in an effort to allocate resources efficiently, so veterans who need the specialized assistance of DVOP staff receive it and DVOP specialists do not spend time serving customers who could be equally well served by other staff. Veterans self-certify to their veteran status and are not required to present a DD-214 unless they meet with Golden Sierra staff and receive WIA-funded intensive or training services later. If the form is presented, however, a copy is stored in the veteran's file so it is accessible should it be needed in the future.

Following the initial assessment, qualified veterans are enrolled in case management with DVOP specialists through the Veteran Intensive Program (VIP). Eligibility for case management and the VIP require being unemployed or underemployed and willing to participate in the program. Unemployed veterans receive priority over underemployed veterans. Approximately 95 percent of all veterans qualify for VIP case management. All initial intake information and case management notes are recorded.

On subsequent visits, DVOP specialists access the veteran's file and work with the customer on career exploration, gaining a civilian vocabulary for describing military skills and activities, building a civilian resume, becoming job-ready, and pursuing job leads. They also refer the veteran to other community programs that might be beneficial; research whether the veteran qualifies for other benefits such as the GI Bill or healthcare, and, as appropriate, refer him or her to the applicable agency; and determine if training through Golden Sierra and/or participation in the VetNet program might be appropriate. When referred to the VA, customers' calls are returned within 24 hours and they avoid much of the bureaucracy because of the close relationship that has developed between the organizations. Veterans' representatives are able to spend more time with the customers and case manage them, unlike Wagner-Peyser staff who must assist as many customers as possible in the resource room.

Veterans' representatives try to determine a veteran's eligibility for WIA intensive and training services before referring him or her to such services, but Golden Sierra WIA staff make the final determination. Veterans referred to Golden Sierra meet with a counselor who provides

career assessments and labor market analysis to see if the customer's desired career is realistic, fits his or her skill set, and is in demand in the area. The career counselor also assists the customer in finding a school to attend or a position for on-the-job training. At this point, the veteran has two case managers—the DVOP specialist and the Golden Sierra career counselor—and attends training and works on becoming job-ready simultaneously. These individuals will exchange information about the customer and work together to coordinate services.

Veterans receive POS in terms of job postings and workshops at the centers. Job listings posted by employers or by AJC staff on their behalf are placed in a 24-hour hold in CalJobs during which only veterans may see and respond to the listings. All veterans who meet with veterans' representatives learn how to use the CalJobs database so they can search by job title and category to find available jobs. Veterans' representatives may also email listings that seem particularly suitable for a veteran directly to that veteran to ensure they are noticed. Golden Sierra staff send their monthly schedule of workshops to the veterans' representatives, who then forward that information to veterans and tell them to call the front desk to immediately sign up. Even though no slots are reserved for veterans, veterans receive an email with the schedule, whereas nonveterans will see the schedule only if they come into the center. This enables veterans to sign up for workshops before nonveterans. Veterans also receive priority for training and other funded services and will be assigned funds before a nonveteran. The Golden Sierra staff member who determines eligibility for WIA-funded training also establishes the priority status of each individual to ensure appropriate ordering for open slots and funding.

Although eligibility criteria for military spouses are defined on a flyer displayed in the AJCs, this status is not asked about in any of the paper intake materials, nor is there a place to record it should it be volunteered. It is, however, probed in both the CalJobs and VOS registrations. There, the questions needed to determine POS eligibility as a veteran or eligible spouse are asked. Terms that could have multiple definitions in different contexts or that might be unfamiliar to customers—such as *veteran, transitioning service member,* and *eligible spouse*—are defined when they are hovered over in VOS. Although the four determinants of eligible spouse status are not asked as individual questions, the criteria are thus available for viewing.

3. Self-Service Materials and Systems

Public-access computers in the resource room enable customers to begin their job search and work on becoming job-ready. Customers can access the CalJobs database, which contains more than 50,000 job openings, from the center or from their home computers. This system provides several types of job search, including by skill and job title. The veterans' representatives teach the veterans how to use the CalJobs system so that they are empowered to search on their own and not wait for positions to be emailed to them. Other self-service tools available to customers include career assessments such as Eureka, resume-builder websites, and the Connection Center website. The Connection Center website contains many resources for veterans, including links to community resources and educational institutions.

Although job search, resume-building, and other activities can be completed on CalJobs and the Connection Center website without going to an AJC, certain resources can be accessed only at the center. Numerous workshops benefit veteran (and nonveteran) customers, including presentations on resume writing, job search skills, labor market analysis, computer skills classes, and interviewing techniques and practices. Mock interviewing sessions with employers are

especially helpful to customers for their realistic nature and the impact of receiving feedback from actual interviewers. Customers can participate in job clubs, ProNet, VetNet, and other networking groups only in person.

4. Customer Service and Reporting Systems

At the time of the site visit, California was in the process of rolling out new computer systems. In the past, each region and various providers within regions chose the computer systems they would use for customer and service tracking. Those data were then entered in the statewide Job Training Automation (JTA) system. JTA was a tracking system that started under the Job Training Partnership Act and was modified to collect WIA data when that program began. Because it was adapted, rather than specially constructed for that use, the system lacked a degree of effectiveness. Some sites decided to do their tracking in JTA, but others used various systems and entered the required data into JTA later. Golden Sierra used JTA for its tracking.

In August 2010, Golden Sierra transitioned from JTA to the VOS system, which was created by Geographic Solutions. VOS has both staff and customer sides. Staff use the staff side of the system to register customers, track their demographics and service usage, store scanned documents, and record case notes. Staff can run ad hoc reports from VOS using a variety of desired fields. The customer side, which is accessed through connectioncenters.com by registered customers from any location, has a wealth of career exploration, skill development, resume-and letter-writing tools, and a link to CalJobs. It also has information on other types of resources, such as unemployment insurance and health, welfare, and nutrition programs. A veterans' page details and links to a variety of benefits for which veterans might be eligible, as well as veterans' organizations, mental health providers, disability organizations, and governmental and advocacy groups. The site also has a job search feature.

EDD has a separate system called PASS for tracking its customers. Veterans' representatives use PASS to document information on each veteran's initial assessment, the services received, and case management notes. All of the case-managed customers in the state can be viewed by any veterans' representative, allowing easy transfer between AJCs when customers move. This system generates reports at a variety of levels, from the entire state to the caseloads of individual veterans' representatives. One function enables viewing of all referrals made on a job listing, when the referral was made, and by whom. If someone refers a nonveteran during the 24-hour hold, the veterans' representative can see it, identify the responsible person, and speak with him or her. Veterans' representatives can run reports of veterans who are newly registered in CalJobs and who live in the zip codes covered by the office, and can match job listings with appropriate veterans and send referrals. EDD managers print a copy of every DVOP specialist's caseload from the PASS system and discuss it with the DVOP specialist on a monthly basis. DVOP specialists can request this report whenever they want and do not have to wait for a manager to bring the report to them.

PASS and VOS do not interact and staff members from the two agencies are not able to see one another's entries. Because of their good relationship, Golden Sierra and EDD staff can always ask each other for additional information about specific customers and work collaboratively to address their needs. One Golden Sierra staff member regularly requests a list of clients from the EDD staff to ensure that no veterans on the Golden Sierra caseload are unidentified.

California is in the process of switching to a new universal system developed by Geographic Solutions that will connect with the existing CalJobs system and that all entities in the AJC will use. At the time of the site visit, staff were not sure of many details of the system as training and roll-out were in the future. It was generally assumed that the system would enable staff members from different programs to work with a customer's file, allowing cross management and collaboration.

C. Translation of Military Experience and Skills

DVOP specialists and managers said the task of translating military language into civilian terms can be difficult, but they feel they do it well. Staff expressed that they wanted veterans to have the ability to translate their military skills to civilian terms on their own, instead of depending on the AJC staff to translate for them and they detailed the tools they use to successfully help veterans do so. The responsibilities of a DVOP specialist include demonstrating to veterans how to use O*NET so that they are empowered to prepare their own civilian resumes. The DVOP specialist explains the entire O*NET process—from keyword searching and sorting through the skills, knowledge, and abilities search results, to matching the keywords with possible job announcements and, finally, explaining to the veteran how to write his or her own resume. They have developed a handout on this process for later reference. Additionally, the veterans' representatives have compiled a spreadsheet with approximately 290 websites that can help veterans translate their skills into civilian terms. The spreadsheet is sorted alphabetically and categorized by subject, such as medical or transportation. Veterans' representatives provide this spreadsheet to veterans and have posted it for access on the Internet.

D. Challenges in Implementing POS

Implementation of POS does not appear to be a challenge in Auburn and Roseville. According to staff from both agencies, EDD and Golden Sierra staff work in harmony at the sites, and many staff members attribute the sites' success and ability to serve veterans to this cohesive working relationship between the two partners. One staff member described their partnership as a "well-oiled machine." The working environment is very collaborative and all staff members are comfortable approaching staff in their cubicles and hallways and asking for clarification on any questions. This sentiment extends beyond colleagues to the managers in the office as well. Staff try to resolve issues and answer questions with one another, but they will approach managers for answers if they need further explanation and assistance.

The fact that many AJC staff members, especially those in leadership positions, have remained at the site for many years—and that some of the leadership are veterans and former veterans' representatives themselves—seems to prevent any challenges or misunderstandings about POS. A 20-year staff member illustrated this point by stating that veterans have always received POS from the site and there has never been any misconception about that. Comprehensive questions during registration identify veterans and eligible spouses and detailed follow-up forms probe for many of the possible barriers that have to be addressed and benefits for which an individual might be eligible but not receiving. Having such standardized procedures helps ensure that staff do not leave anything out when meeting with customers. The use of VSNs from the first encounter shows the dedication to ensuring that veterans and eligible spouses are identified and well served.

However, AJC staff reported that some veterans have misconceptions about POS. One staff member felt that some veterans thought that POS meant that AJC staff would get them a job and that veterans need not put time and effort into the process. One staff member felt that the population of veterans sometimes has unrealistic expectations of civilian salaries, because some of them have received higher pay in the military than they would for a comparable civilian job.

E. Promising Practices in POS Implementation

Promising practices identified in the California sites and discussed throughout this report include the following:

- Promising practices to improve POS procedures:
  - Initial assessment by VSNs to determine job readiness, need for outside services, and eligibility for the VIP
  - Introduction to a veterans' representative and explanation of POS during first visit
  - Ability of all staff members to serve veterans and the collaborative relationship between Golden Sierra and EDD staff
  - Veterans Resource Manual, including federal and state guidances, procedures for serving veterans, and information on other service-providing organizations
  - State Internal Administrative Notices which mirror federal guidance but also provide background for the guidance, and questions and answers received. Expectation that AJC managers will discuss IANs with staff
  - VetNet eight-week intensive program with networking, group critiques, and mock interviews with actual employers
  - Move toward a unified case management system that will enable Golden Sierra and EDD staff to view all services provided to customers by all staff
  - 24-hour job holds in CalJobs for veterans
- Promising practices to improve veterans' awareness of POS:
  - DVOP specialist outreach to newly registered veterans in CalJobs
  - Receipt of reintegration forms of TAP participants interested in information or services related to employment and outreach to these individuals by DVOP specialists
  - Web resources geared to veterans that explain POS
  - Strong relationship with VSOs and others who work with veterans, encouraging them to refer veterans to the AJC
  - Signage explaining POS and the criteria for eligibility
  - Attendance at job fairs, stand-downs, school veterans' clubs, and other veteran-centric events at which information can be disseminated

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Further Guidance and Dissemination of Guidance

California Golden Sierra and EDD staff suggested that the federal government should send more frequent guidance or awareness letters on POS and other policies to remind staff about them. Continued communication from the federal government through a distribution list, sending the notice directly to the state administrators and state boards, and connecting with the sites through social media would help raise awareness about POS. A prepackaged curriculum explaining how to implement certain policies would help the site better train staff. It might be preferable for this curriculum to come from states rather than the federal government so it could be tailored to the policies in each state. Alternatively, another staff person thought that in-person training from an expert would improve staff knowledge of POS.

B. Outreach and Veterans' Services

California could use technology to better serve its customers in several ways. A veteran's representative suggested that the site could use a document-sharing application operating on cloud technology, so that several staff members could access a customer's resume and make changes to it simultaneously. A veteran recently sent the veterans' representative a document this way for input, but the representative was unable to open it. The proposed process would avoid email delays, enable staff and customers to work in documents together but remotely, and eliminate version control issues attendant to emailing documents. Another promising practice a veterans' representative encountered at NVTI was a representative who has a Twitter account that his customers follow. He tweets new job openings so the customers can immediately see and begin to apply to them. The EDD staff member suggested that the AJC operate the Twitter account to target an audience wider than only one DVOP specialist's caseload.

One staff member thought it would be useful to screen customers when they come into the center to evaluate their computer skills. If customers could not perform basic computer functions required for job search, center staff would enroll them in a computer training session to learn how to use email, cut and paste, and create documents. Younger veterans seem to be relatively technologically savvy, but older veterans often lack such skills.

APPENDIX F

STUDY SITE PROFILE: JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

I. DESCRIPTION OF STUDY SITE

A. Population and Local Area Description

Florida has the fourth-largest population of the 50 states, with about 19,058,000 inhabitants, exceeded only by California, Texas, and New York. Of the total population, 15,062,000 people, or 79.0 percent, are ages 18 or older. The median age is 41.1 years; Florida is one of seven states with a median age over 40. About 1,571,000 people, or 10.5 percent of the adult population, are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. By race, 76.3 percent of Floridians are white, 16.0 percent are black, 2.4 percent are Asian, and the rest are of other races. Hispanics, who can be of any race, make up 22.9 percent of the population of Florida. Of those ages 25 and older, 9.3 percent have earned a graduate or professional degree, 16.5 percent have a bachelor's degree, 8.9 percent have an associate's degree, and 30.4 percent graduated from high school or have an equivalency certificate or degree.[15]

As of April 2012, the unemployment rate in Florida was 8.7 percent, not significantly different from the national unemployment rate of 8.1 percent, but significantly lower than the rate in Florida a year earlier, 10.6 percent.[16] In the past decade, unemployment in Florida declined from 2002 through 2005 before holding steady at 3.3 percent through much of 2006. It then rose steadily and peaked at 11.4 percent in the beginning of 2010. Since then it has shown a steady decline.[17]

Jacksonville, located in the northeast corner of Florida, is the largest city in the state in terms of both population and area. Since the late 19th century, Jacksonville has been a major military and civilian deep-water port. The city's economy is broadly diversified and encompasses significant shipping, manufacturing, banking, health care, tourism, and other sectors.

Naval Air Station (NAS) Jacksonville, which is about four miles south of the central business district, is the largest navy base in the Southeast region and the third-largest nationally. Initially selected as a site for state militia training by the Florida legislature in 1905, it has grown ever since. It is home to two active duty Romeo squadrons, two active duty Seahawk squadrons, seven active duty Orion squadrons, the largest training squadron in the Navy, a Reserve squadron, and two Reserve transport squadrons. There are 118 tenant commands, including Commander, Navy Region Southeast; Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing Eleven; and the Fleet Logistics and Readiness Centers. NAS Jacksonville provides services to five strike groups and supports the Army's 101st Airborne and the Marine's Bravo Company of the Fourth Assault Amphibious Battalion during their deployments. In addition to the air station, NAS Jacksonville manages several outlying bombing ranges, together encompassing about 25,000 acres (NAS Jacksonville alone is about 4,000 acres) and employing more than 25,000 military and civilian personnel.

[15] Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, Tables DP02, DP03, and DP05.

[16] Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Regional and State Employment and Unemployment, April 2012–May 18, 2012.

[17] Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, seasonally adjusted monthly data.

Naval Station Mayport is located at the mouth of the St. Johns River at the Atlantic Ocean and covers more than 3,400 acres. Commissioned in 1942, it has become the third-largest fleet concentration area in the country. It hosts more than 80 tenant commands, including 22 ships and six Light Airborne Multi-Purpose System (LAMPS) Mark III helicopter squadrons. Its harbor is capable of accommodating 34 ships and an 8,000-foot runway can handle any aircraft used by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). A nuclear-powered carrier is slated to be stationed at Mayport beginning in 2014 and the port requires about $500 million in enhancements to support the larger ship.

Blount Island Command, located upriver from Mayport and just outside the Jacksonville beltway, is a Marine Corps Logistics Base that supports the Maritime Prepositioning Force, which provides for rapid deployment of personnel to link with prepositioned equipment and supplies on forward-deployed Maritime Prepositioning Ships. The command has slightly fewer than 1,000 personnel, with about one-fourth of them being military or DoD civilians and the rest contractors.

B. Local Workforce System

1. Organization

Workforce Florida, Inc., the statewide workforce policy and oversight board; the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DOE), responsible for administrative and fiscal affairs; and the state's 24 regional workforce boards, responsible for service delivery through American Job Centers (AJCs), were created in 2000 by the Florida Workforce Innovation Act. Workforce Florida's board of directors is largely appointed by the governor, with four appointments made by the Senate president and House speaker. Together, these organizations make up the Employ Florida network. Employ Florida links all of Florida's state and local workforce services and resources. It maintains the Employ Florida Marketplace website that facilitates job search and employer/worker matching across the state, education and labor market information, career exploration, and other areas.

Nearly 100 AJCs are operated by the 24 regional workforce boards across the state. Most regions are made up of multiple counties, but some are single-county regions. The number of AJCs in a region varies, as do the services provided. Local control by regions promotes targeting to the particular industry, population, and geographic characteristics of each area. Local control by the regions is viewed as allowing for greater flexibility in services, especially to veterans, because all funding streams can be used to service them. It also allows regions to set more (but not less) stringent requirements than those set by regulation. For example, Region 8 requires that customers maintain a B average in their training courses to continue being funded through an individual training account (ITA). Though more than 3,000 people a year are served through ITAs, fewer than a handful fail and 99.7 percent of those served through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) complete their training and get a certification. This is accomplished largely through making sure customers fully understand what the program they are considering entails in terms of effort, time, and cost.

Most regions have "Workforce" incorporated into their names in some way, giving some degree of common branding, but some, such as Jobs*Plus* in Region 2, do not. Florida will be undergoing a rebranding of its regions so that the brand is more unified and recognizable across the state. This change is largely viewed positively for the long term as it will enable citizens to

know where to go to receive the expected set of services, even if they move to a different area of the state. In the short term, there could be some confusion as customers get used to the new name and pushback from regions that have developed a strong connection to a different name. At the time of the May 2012 interview, this decision had just been made and the new name had not yet been announced, though some speculated it would be "Employ Florida."

Jacksonville, the area chosen for this study, is part of Region 8, which covers Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns counties. WorkSource, operated by First Coast Workforce Development, the Region 8 workforce board, has seven full-service WorkSource AJCs and five career development centers on campuses of Florida State College at Jacksonville. It also has mobile access points, which are laptop- and staff-equipped vans that travel to 45 locations in the region, providing career advice, resume and interview coaching, employment leads and referrals, and workshops. Some staff are outstationed at various locations, sometimes temporarily, such as when Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) brought many new families to the area, and others for longer terms, such as the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists at Mayport, which offers the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and provides other services. First Coast Workforce Development administers an annual budget of more than $14 million. Its AJCs served 145,000 individuals in the 2010–2011 year, at least 15,800 of whom were veterans.

In general, the centers in the region have similar structures, except for Baker, which serves a small population in a rural area and thus has a smaller staff. A shift has been made to only employing full-time veterans' representatives and, because Baker does not have a sufficient client base to warrant a full-time position, it no longer has one. Baker previously had a part-time veterans' representative, which worked well because it enabled veterans to be served without having to employ a full-time representative.

2. Serving Veterans

Because of the strong military and veteran presence in Florida and the fact that the majority of AJC staff are veterans or are from military families, there is a strong emphasis on veterans' services in the centers. Staff believe that veterans should receive special focus and there has been an effort to improve priority of service (POS) to veterans over recent years. When asked about their responsibilities related to POS, nonveteran representative staff stated that all staff were responsible for providing POS. The relationship between veterans' representatives and other staff was described as good and supportive, with the goal of helping veterans being a priority for both groups. The staff are seated close together and can confer with one another on case management to ensure that all veterans receive efficient and thorough service.

There are 18 full-time veterans' representatives who serve Region 8, some of whom migrate to various AJCs in the region to provide services. There is also a lead regional veterans' representative who oversees the regional veterans' programs. A strong focus is placed on outreach to employers and hiring managers, attending job fairs, informing veterans of available AJC services, and persuading them to visit the center. The local veterans' employment representative (LVER) staff balance these outreach responsibilities with their office responsibilities of resume and job search assistance and referring veterans for needed services. The DVOP specialist's main responsibilities include providing intensive services for disabled veterans or for veterans with barriers to employment and facilitating the TAP, but the program also educates employers and the public on the advantages of hiring veterans. If an LVER staff

person is unavailable to speak to an employer, the DVOP specialist can step in and obtain the necessary information for the LVER staff person to later reach out to the interested employer.

Many programs specifically target the population of veterans in Jacksonville. The veterans' representatives routinely reach out to employers, colleges, and nonprofits in the community to inform them about the benefits of hiring veterans. Veterans' representative staff report that the tax breaks for hiring veterans appeal to employers but that most employers view them as an added bonus when they hire a veteran rather than a reason to seek out and hire veterans. Employers with job openings or training programs specifically targeting veterans often approach the AJC. One example is the Elevate America program, an initiative from Microsoft to train and certify veterans in computer applications. Another is Prudential, which works with colleges and nonprofits to train veterans and place them in paid internships with the goal of transitioning to full-time employment at the end of the internship. The local workforce investment area (LWIA) also offers veteran-specific training programs. It is currently expanding the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) work-study program that hires veterans who attend school. They work 25 hours per week and are paid minimum wage, but are not taxed on this income while they are attending school.

When job orders are received, they are posted on the Internet and DVOP specialists and LVER staff alert well-matched veteran staff about the job opening. The job opening is available to all customers—veterans and nonveterans—so there is no time when only veterans can access the job and apply first. The only exception to this is when a job opening is reported directly to an LVER staff person due to his or her working relationship with an employer. In these cases, the LVER staff person notifies potential candidates about the position and they have an opportunity to apply before the position is made publicly available.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A. Awareness and Usefulness of Federal Guidance

All AJC staff are required to obtain a tier one certification when they are hired; this involves the completion of 500 hours of study through a web portal over a six-month period. This web portal contains information on local policies, including the POS policy. Following the 500 hours of study, staff must pass a test about the policies. The veterans' representatives also receive training at the National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI) in Denver, Colorado, on case management, counseling, POS, and other topics. Additionally, the veterans' representatives are trained quarterly by the lead regional veterans' representative through PowerPoint presentations, computer-based trainings, and team-building exercises. These trainings serve as an opportunity to retrain staff or to introduce them to new or changed policies.

Most staff were familiar with the federal guidance on POS. Veterans' representatives were more familiar with the guidance than other staff, and routinely referred to the guidance as needed when addressing an unknown issue or explaining POS to a customer. Nonveteran staff said they would ask veterans' representatives any POS questions they had, and would never let a veteran leave without receiving an answer to a question. Staff agreed that the state guidance mirrors the federal guidance and was available for reference on the Florida veterans' program website. The local two-year plan, which can be accessed through the center website, also contains the same information as the federal guidance but is reformatted to fit the local policy format.

B. Implementation of POS

1. Veterans' Awareness of POS

Most veterans accessing services through WorkSource are familiar with POS before they arrive at the AJC. Transitioning service members and recently separated veterans learned about the services available to them when they attended TAP while exiting the military. Staff find that veterans not required to attend TAP often either do not know about POS or heard about it by word of mouth. Many veterans who separated from the military years ago, often before the existence of TAP, and lost civilian jobs during the recession, were informed about POS during their first visit to the AJC. At least one staff member expressed concern that eligible spouses might not know about their eligibility for POS. To counter this and to aid in identifying all POS eligible veterans and spouses, each customer entering the AJC is greeted by front-desk staff and asked if he or she is a veteran or military spouse.

a. Outreach and Referrals

The veterans' representatives routinely perform outreach in the community. Downtown Jacksonville is home to numerous social service agencies, a military affairs office serving veterans in the city hall, and a Vet Center that focuses on veterans who have health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). One of the LVER staff regularly visits those sites to provide assistance to their clients and encourage registration in the Employ Florida system so they can receive ongoing email notification of open positions. Veterans' representatives also serve the Salvation Army, the local prison, and other sites where veterans in need of services are found. They visit meetings of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Legion, and

Volunteers of America (VOA) and local churches and organizations that are likely to come in contact with veterans seeking employment, to educate members about the services provided by the AJC so members can then refer others to the AJC. WorkSource sends its mobile access points, one of which is dedicated to serving veterans, to such locations on nights and weekends to reach veterans and provide them services, such as resume and job search assistance. Customer word of mouth has served as the best marketing tool for these local access points; the populations they serve are harder to reach and sometimes seem more inclined to talk to an individual who a peer has said is helpful and will understand them than they are to approach a large organization.

The Transitioning Incarcerated Veterans' Program provides intensive case management and workforce services to veterans transitioning from correctional centers to try to get them back in the workforce and reduce the risks of recidivism and homelessness.

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) grants were held by VOA and then by the city. Neither currently has this grant funding, but the city is trying to get its back. This was seen as a very effective program that provided several positions, including a manager who oversaw the entire program, an employment specialist, and an outreach person who would go into the community to seek out homeless veterans. If the veterans had substance abuse or other issues, they would enter into treatment at the VA; if they were ready for work, housing would be secured for them and they would receive assistance with training and employment. Veterans' representatives from the AJC worked with the employment specialist in the program to serve the veterans' employment needs. With this grant no longer in place, the veterans' representative works more with veterans living in temporary shelters. The representative finds this group to be typically less successful because they lack the wraparound services and because they must leave the shelter and take all of their belongings with them during the day, which hinders them in many ways.

WorkSource is also involved in outreach through its business services staff and veterans' representatives. Both market the AJC to employers and alert them to the services available at the centers. Veterans' representatives focus on education about the reasons to hire veterans, including both the skills and backgrounds they bring and the tax credits and programs associated with hiring them. Business service representatives develop a rapport with a set of employers and work with the human resources departments of those companies to encourage them to post jobs on the Employ Florida website, participate in job fairs, and generally use the AJC as a source of employees. Business services has rented billboards and appeared on television to discuss the AJC and increase awareness.

A recent example of outreach was the Hire our Heroes promotion at the First Coast News station. Region 8 representatives worked at the news station in morning and afternoon sessions, fielding telephone calls from veterans. Before the event, the news station advertised extensively to let the public know that unemployed veterans should send their resumes to First Coast news and call during the sessions to have their questions answered. Similarly, the site also conducted a Hire our Heroes job fair to capitalize on their promotion through the news channel.

Due to funding restrictions, the site is unable to participate in as many physical job fairs as it had in the past, and has turned to the Internet to reach out to individual job seekers. Each quarter, the site hosts a virtual job fair at which employers have a virtual booth with their logos on it, and advertise for all available, open job positions. Business services reaches out to employers to entice them to participate by showing available job postings for the entire week of the job fair.

Individuals can register at home, review the available job postings on the website, and upload their resumes to apply for any postings in which they are interested.

The AJC performs ongoing outreach to its clients through email blasts. Services for veterans are advertised on the WorkSource Florida website and circulated via its "Constant Contact" email list. Although staff agreed that they use the same methods of outreach to veterans and nonveterans, it is clear that they make additional efforts to target veterans and bring them into the centers.

The region makes a concerted effort to include people, particularly veterans, with disabilities in its outreach. Several areas served by the mobile access points have high rates of disability and the mobile access points eliminate the need for those customers to find a way to one of the brick-and-mortar locations. The image on the side of the vans features an individual with a noticeable physical disability, hopefully signaling awareness and welcome to those who see it. All of the AJCs in the region comply with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and have materials and services available to suit various types of disabilities.

b. TAP

Due to the large population of veterans in the area, the veterans' representatives teach the 2.5-day TAP classes at two locations, Mayport and Jacksonville NAS, each week. They hold separate sessions for retirees and recently separated veterans to target the session to the audience's needs. The veterans' session is generally filled with young veterans whose discharge from the armed forces was not voluntary and occurred without much warning. One staff member estimated that 30 to 40 percent of such classes were filled with veterans undergoing early involuntary or medical separation. By contrast, participants in the retirees' sessions tend to be older and had planned to separate from the military.

In the TAP classes, the veterans' representatives discuss many relevant issues with the veterans, including POS, available AJC services, and the federal Gold Card initiative. Attendees are informed that they are eligible to receive a full array of education, resume, career exploration and planning, job search, and case management services. Despite this, staff reported that many of the veterans do not seem to remember that these services are available to them and associate the AJC with job referrals only.

c. Media and Signage

Florida has a very active state communications work group that performs outreach to veterans and nonveterans through social media. The communications work group operates active Facebook and Twitter accounts; one staff member posts on a blog that is linked to the WorkSource Florida website. In addition, staff use email to send hot jobs, job openings, and job fair notices to more than 18,000 customers daily. The region has conducted focus groups and other studies to determine how customers prefer to be served. It has found that the majority of customers want to receive services only online, but that about 31 percent wanted to receive services only in person at a bricks-and-mortar location. It found a strong skill and educational level disparity between these groups and has tailored services and outreach accordingly.

Flyers, brochures, schedules, and other printed materials promoting workshops, websites, job fairs, and available resources are handed directly to customers and are available for

customers to pick up at convenient locations at the sites. These materials serve as reminders of resources that are available online and upcoming events at the AJC and elsewhere, and inform customers of other resources in the community. Such materials included a cardstock flyer on the Employ Florida Marketplace, encouraging registration and providing space to write down the log-in ID and password; a cardstock half page on Career Trax (a locally designed tool), explaining its many uses and giving the website; full-page flyers on a Hiring Our Heroes job fair, the veterans initiative work study program, and benefits for unemployed veterans under the Vow to Hire Heroes Act of 2011; a trifold flyer on military family employment services; a trifold on the veterans center downtown, the readjustment services it provides, and signs of PTSD; and a 60-page Florida Veteran's Transition Pocket Guide.

The Southside center recently learned that it would be moving sometime next year to another location and this has provided it the opportunity to brainstorm more productive ways of informing its customers about POS and serving veterans. One such idea was to have a separate desk at the front of the center where veterans could sign in. A separate sign-in list would ameliorate any concerns on the part of veterans and other customers about perceived line jumping and create a direct flow to computers reserved for veterans. Depending on how the desk was presented and what guidance was posted, this could also help in identifying POS-eligible spouses.

2. POS Procedures

When a customer visits the AJC, front-desk staff greet the customer, ask him or her to sign in, and ask if the customer is a veteran or military spouse. Staff members found that some veterans, most often those from the Vietnam era, do not self-identify even when asked if they are a veteran, but that most military spouses do self-identify. On the sign-in sheet, customers have another opportunity to indicate whether they are veterans or military spouses. The front-desk staff pay particular attention when customers sign in, and if they see either of those boxes checked, they will ask the customer if this is a first-time visit to the center and what services he or she would like to receive during the visit. The sign-in forms are used to record customer activities in the Employ Florida system, including the services received and the staff members who provided them.

If this is the veteran's first visit, front desk staff will encourage him or her to visit a veterans' representative to hear about the benefits to which he or she is entitled. Front-desk staff will call a veterans' representative to meet the customer at the front desk if the customer asks to see one. If a veterans' representative is unavailable at that time, front-desk staff will suggest for the veteran to call and schedule an appointment or to meet with another staff member. This is not to say that veterans are sent directly to veterans' representatives for services. This initial meeting is more akin to an orientation to available services and a conversation assessing what the customer needs and desires. Veterans can be served by any staff member who suits their needs. Some veterans request specific staff members by name because they have heard by word of mouth that this veterans' representative can assist them. When this occurs, they are put in touch with that person.

Customers are referred to the applicable staff member or area of the AJC if they have come to the center for a specific service, such as an Unemployment Insurance claim, self-service, or assistance in gaining training. A customer who wishes to simply use a computer for job search or other self-service activities is directed to the resource room, where he or she will register into the

Employ Florida system. The resource room has staff available to assist with job searching or resumes, and several of those staff members happen to be veterans. If at any point the customer requests to see a counselor, the customer will either meet with a veterans' representative that day, if available, or an appointment will be scheduled for another day. Veterans' representatives regularly check the sign-in sheets and call the veterans to confirm they received the services they needed and to offer them further assistance.

When a POS-eligible veteran visits with a veterans' representative, he or she can receive assistance with one-on-one job searching, resumes, and job referrals. If an employer sends a job directly to the LVER staff, the LVER staff will create a job order, email the veterans who might be interested, and tell them to apply. The job is in the system but available only to veterans for a few days, so they have a head start in applying. Veterans' representatives are also responsible for referring veterans to other programs, such as vocational rehabilitation and WIA. The staff in those programs are responsible for helping the customer submit the application and determining program eligibility, though the veterans' representatives try to refer only veterans who they think will be eligible. Veterans can continue to work with the veterans' representative even after they have been referred to another program.

Veterans regularly participate in some of the many classes offered at the AJC. In the case of a veteran wanting to attend a class that is full, it is generally possible to add a seat. If there are limits, such as the number of available computers, veterans would have priority on the waiting list. Sign-in sheets for class participants are passed on to the veterans' representatives so they can follow up with the veteran attendees to answer any additional questions or schedule an in-person meeting.

Veterans' representatives said that they did not see many customers coming to the AJCs with a Gold Card and, even if they did, they would still receive the same services. When they heard about the Gold Card initiative, they reviewed the requirements and found that the AJCs already met them.

3. Self-Service Materials and Systems

When a customer registers as a veteran in Employ Florida, which can be done on any computer, he or she is electronically notified of the right to POS and sent a follow-up letter through the mail. This letter details the myriad resources and services available at a physical AJC and informs the customer that there are staff members who focus on the needs of veterans.

In the AJC, customers have access to computers, fax machines, printers, books, and job postings to aid them in their career exploration, training, resume development, and job search. There are 25 computers in total—15 in the resource room and another 10 in the testing room, which can also be used for spillover when training or testing are not in progress. Staff members are also always available in the resource room to assist customers.

Career Trax is a locally designed tool, provided by WorkSource, which leads customers through a six-stage progression of self-assessment, research, goal setting, job search, work skills, and career advancement. The website contains self-assessments in each area, enabling customers to identify their needs and interests and develop their skills and knowledge in those areas. It is suitable for individuals in a variety of situations, ranging from finding a first job to changing industries after a layoff or seeking a promotion. It can be used by anyone and does not require

contact with the AJC, but users have the option of contacting a career counselor over the telephone or scheduling an in-person appointment. Customer activities in Career Trax are saved, so users can return at any time and pick up where they left off and so career counselors and customers can access it together. Career Trax had only become available two to three months before the site visit, so most staff did not have knowledge of customer reactions to the new self-service system, but the staff themselves are enthusiastic.

One staff member praised the Virtual Interview tool that was previously available to customers but was cut due to funding issues. The Virtual Interview tool enabled customers to practice interviewing in front of a computer, prompting the customer with questions and recording the responses. The customer could then watch the video of the interview and discover any areas in which he or she needed to improve, such as nervous hair twirling and other mannerisms.

4. Customer Service and Reporting Systems

Employ Florida is the comprehensive, integrated, statewide job search, data collection, case management, and reporting mechanism for the state's local workforce system. It was created by Geographic Solutions, a firm that operates such sites for many states. The ability to access information on the Employ Florida website depends on the individual's classification; for instance, a customer can access the public side of the site, whereas a DVOP specialist can access the case management notes for customers.

All veterans and eligible persons are flagged as such in the system, which enables veterans' representative staff to provide services to them, indicates to all staff that these customers are entitled to priority, and puts a marker on the profiles of veterans so employers can identify them as veterans. Staff were uncertain about whether employers have the ability to search resumes by veteran status. If a customer does not want employers to know he or she is a veteran, the customer may register as a nonveteran, but this would mean he or she would not be able to obtain services from a veterans' representative. Staff do not report having encountered such a situation, though they have encountered veterans who do not want priority or to discuss their veteran status.

Overall, staff were pleased with the Employ Florida system. One of the most effective aspects of the Employ Florida system is that information can be accessed universally across centers in Florida. This means that if a veteran receives services in a different center, the staff member working with the customer can retrieve case management notes from the last person who worked with the veteran. When veterans are referred to outside programs, the referral is recorded in the Employ Florida system, but most other program staff cannot access the system to enter case notes. The exception to this is vocational rehabilitation when there is an LWIA employee working in that office. Two staff members thought the system could be improved if it linked to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) tracking system or if TANF information was merged into the Employ Florida system. Veterans receiving TANF benefits thought it would be helpful to have access to that information. The system has improved operations in the centers and Geographic Solutions was in the process of updating the system at the time of the interviews and hoped to provide version 12 to Florida by the end of August 2012.

Employers can create job orders by logging into the Employ Florida system, but all job orders are screened before they are available to customers. There is a 48-hour wait period before

a job order becomes public; in that time, staff verify that the job order was posted on behalf of a legitimate employer and that there is in fact a job opening available. Staff read through the job order to ensure there are no demographic-specific demands, such as appearance or age, unless there is a valid legal reason.

Staff track all services provided to customers in Employ Florida to fulfill regional, state, and federal reporting requirements. They use codes to track activities and services the customers receive; for example, referrals to training, resume assistance, and job search help all have different codes that are visible in a drop-down menu in the Employ Florida website. This information is analyzed at the regional level and by a veterans' representative at the office level. Management on the regional level discusses the regional and center performance in a meeting each month. The veterans' representative staff send a monthly report to the state containing information on veterans' outcomes, the types of services they received, TAP classes, and other information. At the monthly management meeting, the job placement rate for customers and the number of customers served are broken out for discussion. Additionally, program representatives in Tallahassee monitor data on the services received by customers and follow up with veterans' representatives. The federal common measures for employment and training can be created for individual AJCs and for the mobile access points, so credit is justly distributed throughout the region.

The WorkSource Florida website hosted by the region provides a wide variety of resources for area customers. It has sections geared toward jobseekers of different ages, people with disabilities, veterans, military spouses, and employers. It also has sections on career planning, educational opportunities, workshops, and job fairs. Locations of AJCs, where the mobile access points can be found, and useful links—such as to TANF application materials—are provided. This website also hosts the Career Trax tool. Centers in the region can use the website to advertise job fairs, featured employers, and upcoming events.

C. Translation of Military Experience and Skills

All interviewed staff and managers attested to their ability to translate military experience to civilian terminology. In the AJC, most staff have served in the military before their employment at the center or are from military families; they are very familiar with military language. Staff who served in the military work in several different areas of the AJC, including veterans' services, TANF, the resource room, and WIA. Many staff members find the task of translation not difficult and are confident in their ability as well as their coworker's ability to effectively assist veterans with their resumes.

Staff use several approaches to encourage veterans to develop proficiency in talking about their military skills and backgrounds in civilian terms. One veterans' representative said that even when he understood the military information, he would continue to prompt the veteran to explain himself or herself further. This forced the veteran to try to explain his or her military experience in civilian terminology. Another veterans' representative used knowledge and experience from the military to find careers that matched the veterans' skills. For most positions, the representative found that this was an easy task, with the exception of some positions, such as infantrymen. Less familiar staff members consult web-based resources, such as O*NET, or seek help from a veterans' representative to correctly translate a veteran's resume into a civilian resume or understand what civilian jobs might be well suited to the customer.

D. Challenges in Implementing POS

Implementation of POS does not appear to be a challenge in the Region 8 AJCs visited. The proportion of veterans among this region's population is higher than the national average, hovering around 11 to 12 percent. Additionally, most staff members in the AJC have a military background. For these reasons, the AJCs serving the Jacksonville area are completely committed to serving veterans and are highly motivated to implement POS. However, one staff member noted that much learning occurs on the job, so newer staff might be less familiar with policies than more experienced staff. In the previous year, the AJCs lost four or five veterans' representatives due to staff turnover, causing some concern about lost knowledge among staff members.

In addition, some staff members identified minor challenges with the POS procedures. When a customer enters the center and signs in at the front desk, the staff person asks the customer if he or she is a veteran; however, if the customer is a veteran, front-desk staff do not always ask the reason for visiting the AJC. Veterans' representatives have found that they are sometimes called to the front of the AJC to meet with veterans who do not need to see them, possibly because some front-desk staff are under the impression that all veterans should be directed to veterans' representatives. This issue is being addressed as it arises.

For customers, there is some confusion over the meaning of POS. Some customers who are veterans think that POS means that they will automatically get a job when there is an opening. Although veterans do receive a veterans' preference in federal job applications, this does not occur in the civilian world, a fact that is not known to some veterans. The veterans' representatives speak to the customers one-on-one to explain the actual POS policy and how it is applied, as well as how veterans' preference in federal hiring works. In most cases, this remedies the confusion. One staff member thought it is sometimes harder to serve veterans because they have been removed from the civilian job market while serving in the armed forces and do not have realistic salary expectations.

Some staff members did not seem to differentiate between the definition of a veteran for POS and for eligibility for programs. This did not result in denial of POS though, as POS is provided to everyone who claims eligibility. Proof in the form of a DD-214 is not required until the customer is referred to receive funded services, such as training. When a veteran brings the DD-214 to the center, the veterans' representative documents the month, day, and year of entry and discharge from the armed services in the case notes in the Employ Florida system.

Staff members interviewed were generally able to correctly identify part of the eligible spouse criteria, but not all of it. Most staff knew that spouses of those with a 100 percent service-connected disability rating were eligible; and some mentioned the spouses of prisoners of war. The eligible spouse criteria are listed in their entirety in staff documentation but are not included in materials such as customer sign-in sheets. It is understood that the criteria are stringent and the number of people who will meet them is limited. Were a spouse to come in who staff thought might be eligible, they would check the documentation. Military spouses who are not eligible for POS, a relatively large group in this region, are told of their (and their dependents') eligibility for regular AJC services, as well as special assistance from a Military Family Employment Advocate. These advocates, one of whom is located in the Southpoint center, provide case management, resume assistance, assessment and testing services, interviewing skills training, referrals to educational programs, and other services.

E. Promising Practices on POS Implementation

Promising practices identified in Florida and discussed throughout this report include the following:

- Promising practices to improve POS procedures:
  - Introduction to veterans' representative and explanation of POS during first visit
  - Ability of all staff members to serve veterans
  - Monthly management meeting to discuss placement and service rates and other statistics and upcoming events
  - Contemplated design of reception area of new AJC
  - Use of interviewing techniques to translate military experience and skills
- Promising practices to improve veterans' awareness of POS:
  - Mobile access points, including one dedicated to serving veterans
  - Sending letters to all veterans who register in Employ Florida telling them about POS and available services, and inviting them to an AJC
  - Web resources geared to veterans that mention POS
  - Intensive Military Family Employment Advocacy Program engages spouses who may then tell service member about POS and available resources
  - Participation in television news program and call-in information session
  - Strong relationship with military bases through TAP and spousal services
  - Outreach through VSOs, shelters, the Vet Center, the Salvation Army, prison, and other sites
  - AJC sign-in sheet asks customer to identify veteran or military spouse status

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Further Guidance and Dissemination of Guidance

Florida staff suggested that additional training about the POS guidance was needed due to staff turnover. In particular, one staff member strongly felt that a regional trainer dedicated only to staff training and development would help the AJC improve service to veterans. This is especially important in the eyes of this staff member due to the increase in the veterans' population as the war deescalates and concludes.

Another staff member thought it would be useful to have more cross-site communication and that replicating the best practices from other sites could improve services to veterans. If the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is aware of a promising practice, it would like information about the practice to be disseminated.

The current sign-in sheet completed by customers visiting the AJCs asks if the customer is a veteran or military spouse. This is a good method of identifying military spouses, as they are prevalent in the area and special services are available to them through the Military Family Employment Advocacy Program. It does not help to identify POS-eligible spouses though, except to the extent that it sparks a conversation that brings out those details. Asking on the sign-in sheet if an individual meets any of the specific criteria for spousal eligibility could help identify them.

B. Outreach and Veterans' Services

Many staff members remarked that the AJCs need to offer computer training for customers. Job listings are posted online and disseminated by the AJC via email, many positions now require online application, and employers expect to be able to communicate with potential employees via email. Staff have found that although younger veterans are very computer literate, many older customers, including veterans, who come into the centers are afraid of using the computers altogether or seek assistance. Although resource room staff help however they can, they do not have the time to train each individual on how to use the computer, especially when customers are waiting in line for computers to search for jobs and work on their resumes.

Other staff members commended the veterans' representatives for performing their job responsibilities and beyond, and thought higher compensation would greatly improve the center. They felt that the veterans' representatives do much more than what is required for their position and deserve greater compensation for their hard work.

APPENDIX G

STUDY SITE PROFILE: JUNCTION CITY, KANSAS

I. DESCRIPTION OF STUDY SITE

A. Population and Local Area Description

Kansas is a sparsely populated state of 2.9 million people that ranks 33rd by population. Of the total population, 2.1 million or 74.6 percent are ages 18 or older. The median age is 36.2 years. About 216,000 people, or 10.2 percent of the adult population, are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. By race, 85.2 percent of Kansans are white, 5.8 percent are black, 2.5 percent are Asian, and the rest are of other races. Hispanics, who can be of any race, make up 10.5 percent of the population of Kansas. Of those ages 25 and older, 10.5 percent have earned a graduate or professional degree and 19.3 percent have a bachelor's degree. Of those ages 25 and older, 7.4 percent have an associate's degree and 27.8 percent graduated from high school or got an equivalency certificate or degree.[18]

As of April 2012, the unemployment rate in Kansas was 6.1 percent, significantly lower than the national rate of 8.1 percent.[19] In the past decade, unemployment in Kansas peaked at 7.6 percent in the summer of 2009 and 5.9 percent in the summer of 2003, with a trough at 4.0 percent from the end of 2007 into early 2008.[20]

Local Area II of the Kansas Workforce System covers 17 counties in the northeast corner of the state. Fort Riley, the main military base in Local Area II, is located between Junction City and Manhattan. It covers 407 square kilometers, more than twice the area of Washington, DC, and has a daytime population of 25,000. The 1st Infantry Division was headquartered there from 1955 to 1995, at which point it transferred to Leighton Barracks in Germany, with the 1st Brigade, 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, and the 937th Engineer Group remaining on post. From 1999 to 2006, Fort Riley was the headquarters of the 24th Infantry Division (Mech), with an active component stationed at Fort Riley and three enhanced Separate Brigades (eSBs) of the Army National Guard: the 30th Heavy Separate Brigade at Clinton, North Carolina; the 218th Heavy Separate Brigade at Columbia, South Carolina; and the 48th Separate Infantry Brigade in Macon, Georgia. The 1st Infantry returned to Fort Riley from Germany in 2006, replacing the 24th Infantry as the post's main division.

This relocation and the addition of several other divisional units as a result of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and changes from the Army Transformation and Global Defense Posture Realignment (GDPR) have increased the population of the post. It is expected to further increase as troops are drawn down from Afghanistan. A new hospital, to be opened in 2014, is currently under construction on Fort Riley, forming a medical campus with the Wounded Warrior Transition Battalion.

[18] Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, tables DP02, DP03, and DP05.

[19] Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Regional and State Employment and Unemployment, April 2012—May 18, 2012.

[20] Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, seasonally adjusted, monthly data.

B. Local Workforce System

The state Workforce Development System is administered by the Kansas Department of Commerce. The State Workforce Board is a volunteer body appointed by the governor and certified by the secretary of state. The state board oversees the system, develops policy, and reviews performance reports.

The state is organized into five geographic areas, each containing at least one population hub. The local workforce investment board in each area is responsible for implementing and overseeing the local American Job Centers (AJCs) and administering the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), usually by hiring another organization to do so. The local boards develop memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between themselves and all required AJC partners, outlining the provision of services and how costs will be shared. Currently the operators are: Kansas WorkforceONE (Area I), Heartland Works (Area II), Workforce Partnership (Area III), Workforce Alliance (Area IV), and Southeast KansasWorks (Area V).

The Kansas AJC that is the focus of this study is located in Junction City in Area II. The AJC operator in this area, Heartland Works, is a private, not-for-profit, 501(c)3 organization. Local Area II has three other full-service AJCs: Lawrence, Manhattan, and Topeka, as well as a satellite center in Atchison. The area as a whole sees about 60,000 to 80,000 customers a year, with Topeka being the busiest center, followed by Lawrence and Junction City. Some staff are out-stationed at Fort Riley, where they have offices, conduct Transition Assistance Program (TAP) classes, and provide other services. Junction City staff reported that they serve between 75 and 125 customers per day.

All of the AJCs in Area II are structured in the same way, though they vary in size. Each has a welcome team that takes in customers, registers them, and determines if they are there for self-service or staff-assisted activities. Other staff work one on one with customers, teach workshops and seminars, and provide case management and other intensive services. The business services staff work with employers getting job listings, developing relationships, and organizing career fairs. Staff collaboration is valued and anyone in the AJC is able to work with any customer on general activities, such as resume preparation, interview skills, and job openings; some staff focus on specific activities, such as working with veterans who have barriers to employment or enrolling customers in WIA services. Often, a staff member will meet a customer while staffing the front desk and will continue to work with the customer until he or she needs no further assistance, would prefer to work alone, or begins working with a veterans' representative.

In Junction City, supervisors and staff described a strong working relationship between the veterans' representatives and other staff at the job center. Weekly staff meetings are used to share information about customers and job orders, and staff reported feeling comfortable asking questions of the veterans' representatives at any time. These questions might include Wagner-Peyser staff needing assistance with wording on a veteran's resume.

Numerous partners are collocated in the AJCs. These vary by AJC but often include Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Job Corps, the Educational Opportunity Center (a TRIO program through Barton Community College that offers skill assessments, GED program placement, and other resources), and other services. In Junction City, an additional locational benefit to customers is that Social Rehabilitation Services, which administers vocational rehabilitation,

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and other benefits, is directly next door. Partners who are not physically present at a particular site are often linked to it electronically.

About three years ago, Kansas began intensive efforts to integrate services in its AJC to avoid overlap across programs such as WIA, Wagner-Peyser, and Veteran Services. One person serves as the functional manager for the Junction City and Manhattan AJCs, ensuring that everything runs smoothly. She is a state employee and does not supervise the Heartland Works staff (she is a supervisor for Wagner-Peyser and veterans' employment representative staff), but the staff provided by the various agencies interact seamlessly and function well under this arrangement.

Although Unemployment Insurance (UI) is a separate system and cannot be applied for at AJCs in Kansas, some connections between the programs are largely invisible to customers. When people apply for UI, their application information is used to automatically generate a profile in the KansasWorks case management system and they are prompted to visit the site to expand the profile, create a resume, and engage in other job search activities. Another connection between the programs is through Reemployment Services, which is part of the unemployment system under the Department of Labor. Individuals who are close to running out of unemployment benefits are scheduled to meet with a Wagner-Peyser staff person who provides more one-on-one case management. Often, these individuals are recently separated veterans who are about to run out of benefits.

Veterans' representatives work with veterans to overcome whatever barriers to employment they might face, be it a need for training or education, physical or mental injuries, or issues related to substance abuse or homelessness. Myriad resources and potential referrals are available to assist in these areas and a team approach is taken to ensure that all needs are covered. Kansas won a Veterans' Workforce Investment Program (VWIP) grant in June 2010 with a one-year performance period. It focused on placing 150 recently separated or disabled veterans into green energy jobs. It also participates in veteran-oriented programs such as Helmets to Hardhats and Green Jobs.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A. Awareness and Usefulness of Federal Guidance

Managers reported that the federal guidance (Training and Employment Guidance Letter [TEGL] 10-09) was used to draft local POS policy and that staff are aware of POS guidance because of the high number of veterans served; Junction City serves veterans every day. The Workforce Investment Board (WIB) directly refers to the federal guidance in TEGL 10-09. Junction City staff have had a local-level integration manual for about three years. It specifies AJC procedures, including how to identify eligible veterans and related POS procedures.

In addition, all staff are given the workforce services specialist desk aid when they start work. This desk aid details the expectations of staff, available programs and partners, policies and procedures, how to use the KansasWorks website, and a number of other sections important to doing the job well. The desk aid increases consistency of information across staff and minimizes the possibility of people going to different sources with their questions and receiving different answers. Because the desk aid is geared to all staff members, each gains a general knowledge of what the other does, increasing staff members' ability to work together and correctly direct customers to the most knowledgeable staff for a particular issue. The table of contents of the desk aid also directs staff to the intranet and the integration manual for additional resources on various topics. Section 2c of the desk aid (also available in the integration manual) is about POS for veterans and eligible spouses. This section very clearly presents the definitions of veteran and eligible spouse in use for priority, how they should be identified in the flow of customers into the site, who sees veterans' representatives, and the various assessments to be completed. The POS portion of the desk aid was developed about a year ago; it describes POS in detail and includes TEGL 10-09 and Veterans' Program Letter 07-09. Because of the state's role in AJC operations, the desk aid was developed by state staff and approved by the state veterans' coordinator for use in local offices.

Familiarity with federal POS guidance varied somewhat based on staff's level and experience with veterans' issues. All staff are trained on POS in the AJCs when they begin work and then quarterly to maintain knowledge. The state veterans' coordinator advises new veterans' representatives and provides them with training at least once per year. The veterans' representatives receive additional training at the National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI) in Denver and serve as an informal resource to other staff as questions arise. The general perception among supervisors and staff is that the training and local guidance are sufficient to ensure a working understanding of POS; this is a high priority locally given the large population of veterans and a perceived increase in the number of transitioning soldiers, veterans, and military spouses.

B. Implementation of POS

1. Veteran Awareness of POS

Many of the veterans served locally first hear about POS when they transition out of the military at TAP; spouses sometimes participate in TAP and hear about POS this way. The veterans' representative who facilitates the TAP session explains their POS benefits and advises

the veterans and spouses that POS applies at any AJC. The veterans' representatives discuss 24-hour job holds for veterans, priority of seating for workshops, and other POS benefits.

The message is reinforced at the AJC whether veterans and eligible spouses have been through TAP or not. A prominent poster at the front desk explains POS, and POS is discussed again if customers ask to meet with a veterans' representative. The veterans' representatives indicated that a large share—about half—of the veterans they serve come to the AJC knowing about POS through their participation in TAP. However, many veterans and spouses who left the military some time ago, or who did not participate in TAP, have no knowledge of POS and are advised of their POS rights at the AJC. Veterans' representatives and other staff indicated that most of these customers meet first with Wagner-Peyser staff, who make them aware of POS.

Staff reported that only rarely have they encountered customers who mistakenly think they are eligible for POS. In a couple of situations, customers were in the National Guard but not actually activated. In another situation, a customer self-identified as POS-eligible but he refused to bring in the DD-214 so POS status could be confirmed. Staff suspected that his discharge was "other than honorable;" this customer eventually moved to another city.

a. Outreach and Referrals

Junction City views itself as well positioned for outreach to veterans because of its proximity to Fort Riley and out-stationing of veterans' representatives on post. Outreach to veterans mirrors outreach to other customers in that staff visit employers, schools, chambers of commerce, and community organizations to make presentations about services. These organizations then make direct referrals to the AJC. During layoff situations the AJC offers a rapid-response service program in which its staff meet with affected employees to describe the services available there. Staff from the AJC also try to obtain from the employer a list of employees affected by the layoff so that they can follow up and encourage the affected employees to use the AJC services.

The job of the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist includes conducting outreach to find veterans who have barriers to employment. This involves visits to American Legion halls, homeless shelters, emergency shelters, and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts. At Fort Riley, there is a Soldier Family Assistance Center and the Warrior Transition Battalion (WTB); Junction City conducts outreach specifically to WTB. The WTB contact has referred veterans to the AJC's weekly resume workshops, including six WTB referrals in the workshop before the study interviews.

The local veterans' employment representative (LVER) staff visits employers to learn about their staffing needs and advocate for the hiring of veterans. If employers are not going to hire veterans for any reason, the AJC would like employers to be aware of the career center services and to refer veterans accordingly.

b. TAP

Veterans' representatives teach TAP at Fort Riley every week, alternating weeks among instructors. The TAP is a comprehensive review of resume-building and AJC services, including POS. Veterans' representatives also identify participants who might need additional access to resources and individually recommend that they visit the AJC. TAP is currently a 2.5-day

workshop, which enables the representatives to build rapport with the transitioning service members and any spouses who participate. As a result, Junction City staff find that TAP participants come to the AJC asking specifically for the veterans' representative who conducted their TAP workshop, and that representative will assist them. However, if that representative is out of the office, anyone in the office can help them.

Kansas staff indicated that the TAP program is itself in a state of transition with plans to transfer the program to a private contractor and extend the program length to four days. They stressed the importance of maintaining the direct connection between the veterans' representatives and the transitioning soldiers through the TAP to ensure that these customers get to the AJCs when they need workforce services. Staff reported that they have received very positive feedback about the veterans' representatives at TAP. There is a strong concern that private contractors will not be able to establish that personal connection because they do not work in the career center and are not as well versed in workforce services programs or resume building.

c. Media and Signage

Kansas is one of two states in this study in which interviews were conducted by telephone rather than in person. For this reason, a staff member provided a description of the site during telephone interviews and sent photographs of POS-related materials in the reception area. The Junction City AJC has clear signage in the reception area notifying customers of POS and defining eligible spouses. Eligibility definitions and procedures are very clearly provided on the signage, which is in color and has large type with attention-getting photographs. A poster with multiple agency logos also advises veterans about POS eligibility. Staff indicated that the reception area signage and greeting of customers helps to speed identification of POS eligible veterans and spouses.

2. POS Procedures

When customers visit the AJC, staff at the front desk greet them, ask them to sign in, and ask if the customer is a veteran. The sign-in sheet asks if the customer is a veteran or veteran spouse (but does not define eligible spouse). Veterans are informed of their right to POS. Often, spouses of veterans and active-duty service members will volunteer this information, which can lead to identification of POS-eligible spouses. The greeter determines if the customer has visited the AJC in the past six months and if he or she has an account in KansasWorks. If not, an initial needs assessment is conducted to collect broad information on displaced worker status, interest in training, barriers and limitations, educational attainment, resume status, computer skills, and other information that helps the staff member determine who the customer should see and begin listing the services the customer should receive.

Each person eligible to see a veterans' representative completes a veteran's self-assessment form. This assessment form has been in use for about four years. It gathers eligibility type (definitions are on the back of the form for clarity), newly separated status, barriers, and interests. This information is used to determine if there is a need for intensive services. It also asks if the veteran has separated from active military duty within the past 36 months and whether any issues or obstacles could interfere with the veteran obtaining employment or staying employed. The form asks veterans to check any of approximately 20 issues ranging from age to lack of work skills that might interfere with obtaining or retaining employment. The form also

enables the veteran to request more information on a wide range of veterans' services, including apprenticeship programs, burial and memorial benefits, Veterans Affairs pension, and veterans' service organizations. When an account is created in KansasWorks, veterans are asked additional questions about their length of service, type of discharge, disability rating, and other characteristics that can determine appropriate types of services and eligibility for particular programs.

A customer seeking self-service activities is directed toward the resource room. Most customers seeking staff-assisted services will see the next Wagner-Peyser staff member available and can use the resource room while they wait. Those who have POS are seen first. POS–eligible customers initially see Wagner-Peyser staff unless they specifically request to work with a veterans' representative or they have barriers to employment or other needs best addressed by a veterans' representative. State and local policy is that veterans should be served to the extent possible by Wagner-Peyser staff and resource room materials, reserving the limited availability of veterans' representatives for those veterans who have barriers to employment and require specialized case management. In working with a customer and developing a service plan, a need for training might mean that the customer is further referred to WIA services.

Veterans' representatives see customers who specifically request them, which could happen due to initial contact during TAP or word of mouth, and those with sufficient barriers identified by the veteran's self-assessment or a staff member's appraisal. For the most part, veterans are served by staff members other than veterans' representatives. DVOP specialists primarily act as case managers and LVER staff primarily act as liaisons to the business community who develop job listings.

Veterans are asked if they want to sign up for workshops or specific training programs and a determination is made about the best approach to prepare the customer for job search and employment based on their needs and skills.

POS is described to veterans and eligible spouses as having first access to job postings and priority placement in workshops and trainings if a civilian and a veteran otherwise meet all the same criteria for those services. At this time, staff also request the DD-214 to verify veteran's status, or request a DD-214 through the archives website. The DD-214 is then scanned and uploaded to the veteran's KansasWorks account as a permanent record of POS eligibility. Documentation is also needed for eligible spouses—for example, if they are widowed or have power of attorney for their disabled veteran spouse. Staff noted that the POS flyers in the reception area helped eligible spouses self-identify.

Staff stressed that they provide POS to veterans before receipt of the DD-214, but that ultimately many programs will require documentation to confirm veteran status and program eligibility. For example, Kansas and a few other states have VWIP grants of approximately $4,000 per veteran to use toward certification, training, or on-the-job training. Staff verify the veteran's eligibility before awarding grants. These grants are used to negotiate with potential employers in that the VWIP can supplement an employee's wages during his or her first months of employment and on-the-job training, after which the employer would hopefully retain the veteran and pay full wages. For intensive case management services, the DD-214 is needed to identify the nature of the discharge and to confirm that veterans served at least 180 days. When staff refer veterans and eligible spouses to partner programs, they advise them that the partner

program has its own eligibility requirements and may need to see the DD-214 to independently determine eligibility.

Staff believe that veteran benefits, military income and disability payments do not interfere with program eligibility and do not need to be exhausted; they are non-taxable income. Staff also believe that veterans can use the GI Bill in conjunction with workforce services if they have access to GI Bill funding, although it was noted that this should be balanced with fair distribution of workforce services.

Staff members noted changes in recent years that have improved services to POS eligible customers and ongoing efforts toward further improvement. It was suggested that moving the state veterans' representatives and Wagner-Peyser under the Department of Commerce several years ago contributed to POS improvements more so than the federal guidance. This state-level change provided new opportunities for AJC staff development. For example, prospective veterans' representatives are required to have more experience and education and they receive more training on the job. Previously, veterans' representatives appeared to pick and choose customers they would serve based on who would be easy to place. Other improvements over time include a stronger emphasis on identifying veterans through the sign-in sheet in the reception area and the veteran self-assessment form. Junction City also gradually moved from referring most veterans to veterans' representatives to the current approach, in which all staff work together to serve veterans. Currently, staff are reviewing the 10-minute initial needs assessment to identify improvements; the veterans' self-assessment is a separate form.

3. Self-Service Materials and Systems

Self-service resources are shared across customers; there is not a special room for veterans. There are public-access computers and a copy machine, fax machines, and scanners available as needed. Veterans (and other customers) can use the public-access computers to register with KansasWorks and begin their job searches. Other tools on the self-service computers include resume-creation software; a skills assessment; and Kansas Career Pipelines, which assesses career interests.

KansasWorks is available through the Internet so customers can access it from anywhere. In the first three quarters of 2011, kansasworks.com got about 13 million hits a month from about 145,000 unique visitors. Despite this, staff indicated that it is important for all customers, including veterans, to come to the AJC to make sure they have registered properly and receive direct help. For example, there are ways to build a resume to maximize the number of job hits without increasing the resume-building effort and staff believe it is important to review that directly with veterans.

On a weekly basis, a Junction City veterans' representative generates a KansasWorks report that lists customers who self-registered, self-identified as veterans or military, and have indicated that they reside in the Junction City area. The representative then calls or emails customers with whom there has been no prior contact to provide an overview of AJC services and encourage them to visit. To the extent possible by telephone, these self-registrants are asked to complete the POS items on KansasWorks—when they entered and left the service, type of discharge, and any data elements they did not complete when self-registering. If the POS determination and documentation on KansasWorks cannot be completed by telephone, the customers must come to the AJC. The Wagner-Peyser staff conduct similar outreach for nonveteran self-registrants. It is

difficult to identify eligible spouses in this process and the expectation is that Wagner-Peyser staff will ultimately reach out to eligible spouses who self-register.

4. Customer Service and Reporting Systems

KansasWorks.com is the comprehensive, statewide data collection, case management, and reporting method for the workforce system. It is part of America's Job Link Alliance, a consortium of several states that use the same reporting system. In addition, each workforce center has a website.

Kansasworks.com links programs that appear interconnected to customers but might actually be handled by different agencies. For example, although UI is handled by the Department of Labor and Wagner-Peyser by the Department of Commerce, both programs are featured on Kansasworks.com. The site includes multiple state agencies and 70 federally funded workforce programs. It contains national- and state-level resources and direction to local resources and their physical locations. In the first three quarters of 2011, the site averaged about 140,000 unique visitors a month.[21]

Both participants and staff can enter data into the system and complete modules appropriate to their roles. Internally, case managers from different agencies are able to access the same participant data, aiding in cross-programmatic service delivery and seamless services. Each local board or statewide program is required to submit information to the Department of Commerce through KansasWorks. Staff can generate reports to manage caseloads, monitor performance, and track services provided by all AJC partners.

Customers create an account in KansasWorks and, because it is a statewide portal, this account can be accessed via the Internet and by any AJC in the state. With respect to veterans' POS, the account registration feature asks specific questions about military experience, branch, active–duty status, when active duty started, discharge date, and nature of discharge (honorable, dishonorable, and other). If the customer is a disabled veteran, the system asks for the type of disability rating and when the disability occurred; this helps staff determine if the veteran should meet with a DVOP specialist. The system asks if the veteran has served more than 180 days; if that is the case, staff ask further questions about the customer's veteran status.

Several questions are targeted toward eligible spouses, such as "Are you the spouse of an active duty service member?" and "Are you the spouse of a veteran who died of a service-connected disability?" When AJC staff conduct the initial needs assessment with customers, they review and complete these questions on KansasWorks. Until veterans present their DD-214 to document their status, the information entered in KansasWorks is assumed to be accurate for POS purposes. When the system questions are completed, KansasWorks identifies veteran status, such as campaign veteran, and program eligibility, such as VWIP on a front page or screen. This functionality has been in place for at least 10 years, with improvements over time. Staff indicated that one of the KansasWorks developers is a veteran who had a great understanding of what was needed in terms of veteran eligibility data and reporting to the Department of Labor.

[21] Kansasworks.com quarterly report for the October 26, 2011, meeting of the state board.

Employers post job openings on KansasWorks and can conduct resume searches through the pool of registered customers. Employers specifically seeking veterans can conduct those targeted searches to the extent that customers have self-identified as veterans when they registered on KansasWorks. It was not clear if the system automatically screens out veterans with dishonorable or other-than-honorable discharges for these employer searches. When employers search for veterans they simply see an American flag icon that indicates that the customer is a veteran. KansasWorks has three levels of privacy—public, limited, and private. This means that employers can view more or less of a veteran's resume depending on the privacy level selected by the veteran. With the limited view, employers can view resumes but not contact information. If employers are interested in a specific resume, the AJC staff follow up directly with the veteran. When customers select the public view, employers have direct access to the customer's contact information. For all privacy levels, Social Security number and date of birth remain confidential.

When a job order is opened on KansasWorks, it is accessible only to veterans for the first 24 hours. Veterans are automatically emailed any new job openings that match their skills and qualifications. The job order becomes accessible to other eligible customers during the second 24 hours before opening to the public after 48 hours. Junction City staff also conduct a resume search through KansasWorks when opening a job order to look for eligible veterans who have skills and qualifications matching the job posting; staff contact the veteran to alert him or her of the job opening and encourage the veteran to apply for the job.

Junction City staff enter all services provided to customers in KansasWorks to fulfill reporting requirements and ensure that individual customers are effectively served regardless of where they register and which AJCs they visit. All services received by a customer—including resume research and job search—are visible to staff at any AJC. Supervisors and staff can use different reports from KansasWorks; veterans' representatives access reports regarding employer visits and contacts. As described in Section II.B.3, veterans' representatives generate a report of veterans registered in KansasWorks to compare with their customer lists. Those customers found to have self-registered are then contacted by the veterans' representative and informed of the services offered by the AJC and the veterans' representatives, and encouraged to complete all veteran-related data fields on KansasWorks.

5. Monitoring POS

According to the state strategic plan, the state provides policies, technical assistance, and feedback on performance data to local boards. The state also determines minimum service delivery requirements and develops training for workforce center staff, on which local boards are able to provide input. Local boards must develop a local area plan detailing their goals, how those goals will be measured, and the desired performance level. Local boards are also required to maintain MOUs with their AJC partners addressing the services to be provided, the allocation of shared operating costs, referral procedures between partners, and other details. The Department of Commerce reviews the MOUs.

Specifically regarding veterans, the state veterans' coordinator monitors veterans' entered employment, retention, and average earnings performance measures at the local level. These are tracked on KansasWorks. The state veterans' coordinator has also acted as a secret shopper, posing as a customer even though staff know him, to see how the local process worked and to provide feedback. In addition, the five regional operations managers across the state

communicate to make sure they are handling POS in a similar manner in all Kansas AJCs. Through KansasWorks, the WIB tracks veteran-level statistics, including monthly job referrals and job placements. Counts of veterans and spouses who sign in at the AJC are tracked outside of KansasWorks on a spreadsheet. The system can be set up so that staff can view the results but staff are not familiar with monitoring procedures or outcomes.

C. Translation of Military Experience and Skills

Veterans' representatives and Wagner-Peyser staff are confident in their skills in translating military experience to civilian terminology, and they collaborate with one another during the translation process. Junction City staff use a number of software tools and rely on staff knowledge and experience to translate military skills and experience when developing veterans' resumes. Frequently used tools include O*NET Online, My Next Move, and Coolarmy.mil. Because there are benefits and drawbacks to each website, staff tend to check each website when translating a military position. Ideally the benefits of all of these sites would be combined into one, and staff mentioned that My Next Move (careeronestop.org)—launched in March 2011[22]—was an attempt to do that. But, staff indicated that it is still helpful to check the other sites. Staff stressed the importance of combining these online searches with individual time spent with the veteran to discuss the job tasks; many combat veterans do not realize that many of their military tasks were managerial, administrative, and logistical and thus more easily translatable. Staff found that asking veterans to write out their responsibilities in their own words is very helpful in the translation process, as is probing to clarify a veteran's specific military responsibilities. Veterans' representatives first discuss translation at TAP by saying that they have been through the process themselves, so they have the personal experience to assist veterans.

D. Challenges in Implementing POS

Implementation of POS does not appear to be a challenge in Junction City; Wagner-Peyser staff consistently serve veterans and those who visit the AJC are not sent directly to a veterans' representative unless they ask for one. At the same time, it was acknowledged that AJCs with heavier traffic might need to have different processes in place to ensure that veterans are served quickly. Junction City has tried to mitigate POS implementation challenges by including POS definitions in its local policy and procedures.

A common challenge cited in Kansas was the need for more staff to better serve customers and more thoroughly implement POS. Two staff positions were cut with the loss of American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 stimulus funding and another vacant position has taken time to fill. Staff mentioned that the existing staff shortages made it difficult, for example, to properly identify eligible spouses while multitasking with other responsibilities. These criteria are complex and require more time to review for particular customers.

[22] See TEN 30-10.

E. Promising Practices in POS Implementation

Promising practices identified in Kansas and discussed throughout this report include:

- Promising practices to improve POS procedures:
  - Integration manual and desk aid
  - Quarterly reinforcement of POS guidance with staff
  - Weekly staffing meeting which includes all staff
  - KansasWorks' robust POS functionality, allowing partners to update and view referrals and case notes for a customer in a single file
  - Ability of all staff to serve veterans and strong working relationships between veterans' representatives and other staff
  - 24 hour job holds for veterans
  - Phone or email follow-up by DVOP specialists with veterans who have registered in KansasWorks but who have not visited an AJC
- Promising practices to improve veteran awareness of POS:
  - Signage in reception area explaining POS and defining eligibility for veterans and eligible spouses
  - Commitment to teaching weekly TAP sessions
  - Outstation at Fort Riley
  - Comprehensive outreach to VSOs, shelters, the Soldier Family Assistance Center, Warrior Transition Battalion, employers, chambers of commerce, and others

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Further Guidance and Dissemination of Guidance

Kansas staff suggested topics for additional POS guidance or clarification when current guidance is not sufficiently clear:

1. Guidance that National Guard and Reservists must have federal active duty to be eligible for POS and that state active-duty and training time are not countable
2. Definitions of eligible spouse

It was suggested that, ideally, eligible spouses would have their own identification to facilitate POS. Although a DD-214 specifically for eligible spouses might not be a feasible or acceptable form of identification to develop, better methods and documentation are needed for spousal identification.

Kansas staff recommended that the Employment and Training Administration develop a team of federal experts on POS who can travel to AJCs once or twice a year to provide intensive training, retraining, and technical assistance on POS implementation. This would give AJC staff the opportunity to seek advice directly from experts about implementation challenges they have encountered during the year. This approach also provides the Employment and Training Administration the opportunity to assess implementation progress on a regular basis and provide direct feedback to the AJCs.

More cost-efficient approaches to training and technical assistance on POS include webinars, video conferences, dedicated websites, and blogs. For example, Kansas staff suggested as an alternative to on-site training and technical assistance that federal staff conduct presentations on POS and facilitate questions and answers in a video conference or webinar setting. This approach would allow participation by more AJCs than could be accommodated through on-site training. Directors of Veterans Employment and Training (DVETs) and Assistant Directors (ADVETs) could run the webinars. Kansas staff expressed a preference for having the training and technical assistance managed by federal rather than state government staff.

Kansas staff also recommended that ETA develop a specific POS website at which all AJC staff can ask questions and receive expert advice in real time, and view questions and answers asked by others. It was suggested that a subject matter expert such as an ADVET answer questions submitted to this centralized blog. AJC staff could submit questions about customers with unique sets of circumstances without identifying the customer, and receive clear and timely guidance on whether that customer is eligible for POS. Staff indicated that this kind of centralized resource would improve understanding across AJC staff and consistency in how POS is implemented. The blog provides a low-cost mechanism for refreshing and clarifying information covered in trainings.

B. Outreach and Veterans' Services

A frequent recommendation was the need for additional staff. Stimulus funding had provided an extra staff person each in Manhattan and Junction City and these two staff were well utilized for two-and-a-half years.

Staff indicated the importance of maintaining a strong connection between the AJC and the base by continuing to have veterans' representatives teach TAP on base. Kansas provides TAP facilitators on post at Fort Riley, Fort Leavenworth, and McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita. TAP is not mandatory, and staff feel it should help to transition soldiers into the workforce. Current plans are to turn TAP over to a private contractor, which would sever the direct connection between the AJC and the transitioning soldiers. Staff believe that the AJC veterans' representatives are in a better position to help these soldiers prepare civilian-style resumes and otherwise prepare for a civilian job search. It also appears that TAP might expand from 2.5 to 4.0 days. TAP is well liked but ideally, based on experience and reviews from soldiers at Fort Riley, it would include more resume-building and other services that veterans' representatives currently provide. Hiring another DVOP specialist or LVER staff person would enable all of the veterans' representatives to support an expanded TAP program while continuing to provide case management, meeting with employers, and other job functions.

Kansas staff suggested that there is room for improvement in outreach to veterans. They are beginning to follow a model used by one of the veterans' representatives in the Kansas City area. This veterans' representative conducts outreach and essentially builds cohorts of veterans, bringing the cohorts in for group classes a couple of times per month. This veterans' representative reviews POS and services for veterans at the group classes. Each cohort becomes in effect a support group. At Junction City, this model has worked well even with a very small group.

Staff also suggested that although they access one another's calendars, it would be helpful to improve the local procedure for assisting a veteran who needs a veterans' representative when one is not in the AJC.

Kansas staff find that the O*NET military translator is not as functional as others, such as COOLArmy.mil. It was suggested that O*NET review the MOS code and update the translations to civilian positions.

APPENDIX H

STUDY PROFILE: NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

I. DESCRIPTION OF STUDY SITE

A. Population and Local Area Description

About 8,021,000 people live in New Jersey. Of them, 6,679,000, or 76.8 percent, are ages 18 or older. The median age is 39.2 years. Veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces comprise about 6.6 percent of the adult population, or 445,000 people. By race, 69.2 percent of New Jerseyans are white, 13.4 percent are black, 8.5 percent are Asian, and the rest are of other races. Hispanics, who can be of any race, make up 18.1 percent of the population of New Jersey. Of the total population ages 25 and older, 13.3 percent have earned a graduate or professional degree, 22.0 percent have a bachelor's degree, 6.1 percent have an associate's degree, and 29.4 percent graduated from high school or have an equivalency certificate or degree.[23]

As of April 2012, the unemployment rate in New Jersey was 9.1 percent, significantly higher than the national unemployment rate of 8.1 percent.[24] Unemployment in New Jersey hovered around 6.0 percent in 2002 and 2003 before hitting troughs around 3.3 percent in mid-2005 and early 2007. It then rose steadily and has fluctuated around 9.5 percent since mid-2009.[25]

Newark, New Jersey, which lies about eight miles west of Manhattan, is one of the nation's major air shipping and rail hubs, with the port of Newark being the largest container shipping terminal on the east coast. In addition to shipping, insurance and manufacturing are major industries.

No military bases are located in close proximity to Newark. The closest installation, Picatinny Arsenal, is approximately 28 miles from Newark in Morris County and was established by the War Department in 1880. Picatinny Arsenal is the Joint Center of Excellence for Armaments and Munitions. It provides products and services to all branches of the military and specializes in the development of advanced conventional weapons systems and conventional ammunition. The installation covers nearly 6,500 acres. It is one of the largest employers in the county, with about 90 military personnel, 3,900 civilians, and 1,000 contractors.

B. Local Workforce System

1. Organization

The American Job Center (AJC) in Newark is a comprehensive AJC and is the busiest AJC in the state; at the time of the site visit it served approximately 500 customers a day and up to 20,000 customers per month, including multiple visits and services for the same customer. The

[23] Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, Tables DP02, DP03, and DP05.

[24] Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Regional and State Employment and Unemployment, April 2012–May 18, 2012.

[25] Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, seasonally adjusted monthly data.

study site visit to the Newark AJC took place on May 15 and 16, 2012, and included interviews with AJC staff and management, veterans' representatives, and a focus group with veterans.

Services at the AJC include Unemployment Insurance (UI), Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Wagner-Peyser, Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families/Work First New Jersey (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), vocational rehabilitation, veterans' services, Newark Works, and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)—whose representative comes to the office to serve customers twice a week. Customers who come to the AJC to receive UI, TANF, or SNAP also receive employment and training services. The Workforce Investment Board (WIB) director, the AJC operator, the employment service manager, the manager of the division of vocational rehabilitation, and the supervisor for the UI division share a suite of offices. Newark Works, the city workforce agency, has a separate suite of offices in the same building. AJC management stated that one of the advantages of collocation across all of these partners is that Newark is truly a one-stop center. A customer can enter the AJC and receive any one or all of these services in the same location. The partners periodically have management team meetings at which they discuss their programs and services.

In addition to the Newark AJC, there is a satellite center in Newark at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regional office. A veterans' representative is out-stationed at that satellite office through a memorandum of understanding with the VA. That office has a focus on vocational rehabilitation; for example, a psychiatrist is available to veterans, as are other specialized services not available at the central AJC. Veterans can obtain their DD-214 forms within three days at the VA-based satellite office; it takes four to six weeks to request a DD-214 through the AJC. Because the satellite office is collocated with the VA, VA employment specialists are available to serve veterans. The veterans' representative can describe AJC services and POS and directly refer veterans to services at the AJC without sending them through orientation or other intake steps; there is an expedited priority of service (POS) and referral to the AJC. The out-stationed veterans' representative also works out of the Newark AJC one day a week.

The other AJC in Essex County is located in East Orange; although it does not provide UI services, its structure is similar to the Newark AJC.

2. Serving Veterans

Veterans' representatives and AJC management described the commitment to serving veterans as generally strong in the Newark AJC; they claimed that the staff environment was "like a family" and committed to serving veterans. The employment service manager, who runs the AJC employment and training services, is a veteran and was previously both a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and a local veteran's employment representative (LVER), and consistently emphasizes the importance of POS for all veterans. Many staff at the Newark AJC have relatives who have served in the military. Veterans are generally referred directly to the veterans' representatives, although they can be served by all AJC staff. A LVER staff person and a DVOP specialist work in the Newark AJC and a DVOP specialist works in the satellite center. Veterans' representatives provide services that extend beyond the employment, training, and benefits provided by AJC partners. For example, representatives try to determine whether veterans are homeless or hungry and in need of greater assistance than they seek. The representatives connect these veterans to health or mental health services, legal assistance,

housing, bus cards, military benefits, or the military medical entitlement card. However, there was a perception among some staff and focus group respondents that some AJC staff are not fully committed to veterans' POS; for example, focus group respondents indicated that they must take the initiative to alert AJC staff of their veterans' status.

According to one veterans' representative, there is a state plan for veterans' services, although this representative had not personally reviewed it. The plan describes the AJC's supervisory structure and how LVER and DVOP staff work within that organizational structure.

AJC management reported that at the height of the recession service counts were substantially higher, with several subsequent peaks. AJC managers reported that Newark was hit especially hard by the economic downturn, with a 16 percent local employment rate. Manufacturing has moved out of Newark. As the economy improves, there are construction jobs related to arena, hotel, and waterfront development, and some of those employers request veterans with specific training.

AJC management and veterans' representatives indicated that placement rates in Newark for all customers tend to be lower than the overall state placement rate because of the educational and demographic characteristics of customers at the Newark AJC. Customers tend to have many barriers to employment and it can be challenging for staff to place a high percentage of customers. However, staff have pushed to get customers to obtain commercial drivers license certification, to the extent that they caused a glut in the local market. In addition, one AJC staff person works extensively with ex-offenders and is viewed as being highly successful at placing these customers. Although a veterans' representative identified a large number of current job openings, most required college or several years of experience; these openings are not a fit for the predominantly older veterans who have been downsized from low-skilled manufacturing positions.

It was reported that although a large number of female veterans reside in the Newark area, very few come to the Newark AJC for services. AJC staff believe that female veterans are reluctant to seek services. Although it is not clear why this is the case, one assumption is that female veterans may return immediately to work or caring for families upon discharge without seeking retraining. Representatives also believe that pride and reluctance to ask for benefits prevent both female and male veterans from requesting assistance. Veterans' representatives try to convince these veterans that they deserve such benefits.

Staff noted that changes in management in the AJC and the veterans' representatives unit had led to improvements in the implementation of POS in recent years. These included changes made to the process of connecting veterans to the representatives during the intake process and in employer outreach. For example, a veterans' sign-in clipboard at the reception desk was added. In addition, staff noted that there has been a greater emphasis on case management of veterans and ensuring that there is accountability for services provided and the results of those services. They are held accountable for maintaining individual-level case notes so that there is a better understanding of when outcomes do not meet goals. AJC management reported hearing that customers like being served in the Newark AJC because the focus is on efficient service; management does not like to see customers waiting or being referred across several agencies.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A. Awareness and Usefulness of Federal Guidance

Veterans' representatives and AJC staff appeared to have detailed knowledge of state and VA guidance regarding veterans, and strong familiarity with veterans' programs, but generally did not express a detailed understanding or familiarity with the federal guidance on POS. There is no written, local-level POS policy.

Staff tended to define veterans' POS in very general terms as ensuring that they serve all veterans first and as quickly as possible. Although representatives and staff who had recently reviewed the federal guidance indicated that it was helpful, there did not appear to be widespread familiarity among respondents with the criteria for POS eligibility and some had never reviewed the federal guidance. For example, veterans' representatives tended to articulate the definition of an *eligible veteran* as anyone who has served for at least 180 days after basic training and was federalized in the case of National Guard or Reserves, unless they had a hardship discharge or disability. The Workforce New Jersey registration form asks for length of active service to identify POS-eligible veterans while the TANF registration form (labeled One-Stop Career Center Customer Registration Form) specifically asks whether veterans have served for more than 180 days.

Representatives noted that in the past, when representatives had served veterans with fewer than 180 days of service, the VA office in Newark had indicated that these are not eligible veterans in the state of New Jersey; the regional VA office appears to have defined the parameters of a POS-eligible veteran in a way that is inconsistent with the broader definition provided in the federal U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) guidance. The regional VA office has provided reference materials for the AJC. However, staff emphasized that all veterans are given POS. For example, one representative described a situation in which a homeless veteran who did not meet the more stringent 180-day definition was told that he did not meet the criteria of being a veteran, but was nevertheless served by the representative. In addition, a veterans' representative indicated that disabled veterans are given a higher priority—they are placed in case management status.

An eligible spouse was defined in the Newark AJC as the spouse of a 100 percent disabled veteran. A representative indicated that the spouse would have to self-identify as such. One AJC staff person indicated that it had been "a while" since the POS definition had been reviewed with staff. That staff person could not recall when an eligible spouse had last come to the Newark AJC, although eligible spouses come to the satellite office at the VA in Newark from time to time.

AJC management and veterans' representatives distribute new federal and state guidance to other AJC staff as it is released; the veterans' representatives are viewed as ongoing resources on veterans' issues by AJC and Newark Works staff. AJC management reported that POS guidance from the state has been primarily in the form of meetings and emails on priority. Management also reported that veterans' POS is discussed during the AJC partner meetings. The DOL representative reportedly visits the Newark AJC on a frequent basis and is very hands-on and committed to veterans' services and POS. AJC staff feel that this approach helps make them aware of any changes and where they need to focus in terms of veterans' services and POS. The

state veterans' representative works closely with DOL in providing oversight of the AJC and identifying areas in which the AJC should prioritize efforts.

AJC management described staff training on POS as encouraging staff to ask questions about aspects of POS they do not understand. The emphasis is on serving all veterans regardless of circumstances. In addition, veterans should not have to wait long for services, and AJC management wants to know if that happens. Staff are told to trust the veteran's self-identification and the veterans' representatives will verify eligibility. In the meantime, whether workforce staff or veterans' representatives initially serve the self-identified veteran, POS should be provided.

Some staff have attended DOL- or state-provided training on veterans' issues, including POS and eligible spouses, but this training has not been widespread among AJC staff and management. More training has been offered since fall 2011, when troop levels were reduced in Iraq and Afghanistan and an influx of veterans was anticipated; that influx has not yet materialized. Veterans' representatives attend training in Trenton, New Jersey, and at NVTI in Colorado; although the state-based training provided by DOL is usually held once a year, there were two trainings in fall 2011. There is also training approximately twice a year in the AJC, when representatives share new guidance in a general office meeting. Veterans' representatives viewed this as adequate, indicating that each unit in the AJC has a full workload and it is therefore most efficient to prioritize veterans and direct them and questions about veterans to representatives.

B. Implementation of POS

1. Veterans' Awareness of POS

At the Newark AJC, veterans first learn of POS during their initial interview with a veterans' representative. This happens after they have received orientation and taken a Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) assessment at the AJC. To the extent that veterans know about POS before coming to the AJC, they have learned about it through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) or word of mouth, according to a veterans' representative. Military spouses often think they are POS-eligible but do not understand the criteria. A veterans' representative also reported working with some National Guard members and reservists who did not meet the full POS criteria yet thought they were eligible.

A veterans' representative indicated that about five customers a week mistakenly think they are eligible for veterans' POS, generally because of their discharge status. In cases of dishonorably discharged veterans, the AJC informs them they are not eligible for POS.

One of the veterans in the focus group reported hearing about the Newark AJC veterans' representatives from a friend. However, this participant was not asked at the front desk about veterans' status. This veteran asked to see a representative and was then asked to sign a clipboard for veterans; the initial wait to see a representative was about an hour. Another focus group participant found out about the AJC veterans' representatives online and had a similar experience when coming to the AJC for in-person services. This participant felt that the information received after that initial visit was not particularly helpful and that veterans' POS was not particularly useful.

a. Outreach and Referrals

AJC management indicated that word of mouth is the best form of outreach to inform veterans about POS and the veterans' services at the AJC. Veterans' representatives conduct outreach through job fairs, direct contact with employers, homeless veterans' groups, and other organizations. They would like veterans to better understand that the AJC's services are available even for employed veterans; these veterans might want a better job or need other kinds of assistance. The veterans' representatives also participate in a number of stand-downs. Representatives reported participating in more job fairs over the past year than typical—approximately three or four in the five-month period before the site visit, as well as the Essex County Homeless Initiative. At a recent veterans-specific job fair with 50 employers, the representatives registered veterans on Jobs4Jersey, assisted with resume writing and military skills translation, and provided job coaching and job interviewing techniques and skills. These outreach events generally focus on Newark, although there were plans to participate in an upcoming veterans-focused job fair in Camden on the U.S.S. New Jersey.

A veterans' representative described working with employers on setting up positive recruitment activities. When outreach to an employer identifies job openings, the representative will ask the employer to give a seminar at the AJC at a designated time and review potential job candidates. The representatives will then invite eligible veterans to that seminar and also administer skills assessments. A veterans' representative indicated that employers are not frequently motivated to hire veterans by the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes tax credit because of the paperwork involved; in the representative's experience, smaller companies are more likely to pursue the $9,600 tax credit than larger companies. Other local employers hire frequently through references from current employees, even though positions must be posted, which makes it difficult to put veterans forward for positions. Veterans' representatives and focus group participants indicated that some local employers are reluctant to hire veterans; they are concerned that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) will present workplace issues.

Veterans in the focus group expressed frustration with the job fairs and some indicated that they no longer attend these events. The perception is that employers attend these events only so they can advertise that they participated in a veteran-focused event—it makes the employer look good even if no one is hired.

b. TAP

As indicated, veterans who come to the AJC with some familiarity of POS have typically learned about it through TAP. Because the Newark AJC is not close to a military installation, the veterans' representatives do not participate in TAP sessions. One representative indicated that during TAP sessions female transitioning service members especially must be encouraged to visit their local AJCs for assistance, because female veterans tend not to seek AJC help.

Some veterans in the focus group reported that, although recently discharged, they did not participate in TAP because of their discharge status. These veterans did not receive information about workforce services and POS typically provided through TAP, even though they would be in real need of this information for their transition to civilian employment.

c. Media and Signage

The reception and general customer service area of the Newark AJC is extremely utilitarian and has high traffic; there is no visible information regarding veterans' POS or veterans' services. However, when a customer has been identified as a veteran and referred to a veterans' representative, he or she is escorted to a more private area of the AJC that is separated from the main public area by a glass-partitioned wall and doors. The AJC's veterans' representatives are seated at the rear of this area. In contrast to the front—the general public area of the AJC—the representatives' area has comprehensive signage and information regarding veterans' POS and a wide range of veterans' services. It is a warm and welcoming area within the AJC.

Veterans in the focus group indicated that the AJC used to have signs posted in the public area, but there were none at the time of the site visit. Staff reported that a veterans' representative had asked the state to put up more signage in the public area of the AJC. Another representative indicated that statewide media campaigns have been discussed at meetings but that representative has seen little progress on clear messaging regarding POS, apart from billboards on NJ Transit buses advertising veterans' services. An AJC manager also commented on the dearth of marketing to veterans and their lack of awareness of the special services and training for which they are eligible, including that employers hiring veterans receive incentives.

2. POS Procedures

AJC management describes the goal of POS as identifying veterans and providing service to them as quickly as possible. When veterans first come to the Newark AJC, staff ask them to sign a designated clipboard for veterans at the front reception desk. A receptionist will call the veterans' representatives in back to say that a veteran needing assistance is in the AJC; whichever veterans' representative is available will come to assist the veteran. The representative will then determine whether the veteran is a first-time visitor requiring registration or whether the veteran has already begun to receive services, by asking the veteran and also entering his or her Social Security number into America's One-Stop Operating System (AOSOS), the workforce tracking and reporting system used by the Newark AJC. A representative described this intake process as much faster than the process for nonveteran customers, who sign a separate clipboard if they want job search assistance and wait until a staff person in the placement unit becomes available. The process for nonveterans can take two hours, depending on the customer traffic on a given day. If none of the veterans' representatives are available, placement unit staff serve customers from the veterans' clipboard before serving customers from the general clipboard. Veterans participating in the focus group indicated that they are not typically asked about their status when arriving at the front desk—it was up to them to state their veterans' status and to ask the receptionists to call a veterans' representative. Staff indicated that receptionists should also check whether a veteran has already registered, but that does not always happen either.

Like all customers, the veterans complete a registration form and receive orientation. Veterans' registration forms used to be distinguished from other customers by color: the veterans' form was green and the general form was white. The Workforce New Jersey registration form includes a question intended to identify eligible veterans, asking the veteran's length of service. The registration form also asks if the customer is a disabled or special disabled veteran and whether the veteran served in a campaign. After the registration form is completed the registration data are entered into AOSOS. The entry process takes about a day, although all the green veterans' registration forms used to be pulled and data entered into the system first

every day. An AJC manager indicated that the green forms are no longer used because staff found that not everyone is immediately willing to disclose themselves as veterans. After the registration data are entered, veterans are identified in the AOSOS system as such based on their completion of the registration form, and all customers receive a white scan card that contains their name and Social Security number. The scan card documents AJC visits and service receipt in the system for funding purposes. Customers who lose their scan cards receive new ones.

At the time of the site visit, one-hour orientation sessions were held 3 to 5 times a week. All AJC services are described during the orientation and veterans are asked to self-identify so that they can be provided POS and directed to the veterans' representatives. Customers are encouraged to complete the veterans' identification section of the registration forms. During the orientation, veterans are asked to sign the veterans' clipboard so that they can meet with a representative that day. Because AJC staff commonly use the 180-day service definition when defining POS eligible veterans, there is potential for some eligible veterans to be overlooked for POS at this stage. Orientations frequently fill up and overflow sessions are conducted simultaneously in another room; nobody is turned away from orientation. After the orientation, veterans and other customers take the TABE assessment of skills and aptitude.

Regular customers must wait 24 hours after orientation to receive services, but veterans can sign the clipboard and receive services right away. The veterans' representatives take a paper copy of the registration form to assist in delivering services before the data are entered in AOSOS.

Veterans in the focus group reported being asked to verify their veterans' status at different points in the process; this seemed to depend on whether they had filed for UI benefits through the Newark AJC, were asked about their status then, and had to provide their DD-214 for UI purposes. AJC management and veterans' representatives confirmed that depending on how veterans come to the AJC, they will be asked at different points for additional registration information and verification of veterans' status through the DD-214. AJC staff have been trained to contact the veterans' representatives if they identify a veteran while assessing and reviewing eligibility for any programs, and to make sure they have identified all potential programs for which the veteran is eligible, including VOW to Hire Heroes incentives for employers to hire veterans. If the veteran does not have the DD-214 available when it is needed for verification, staff use the National Archives website to request a copy for the veteran as early in the process as possible. Staff noted that the DD-214 is critical to have when a training or educational program is about to release funding to a veteran, especially if veterans' status is required for eligibility.

Workforce services at the AJC include training and job placement using financial incentives from the state and federal governments. A significant number of AJC customers apply for Work First, the state's TANF program, and food stamps. The registration and assessment process identifies veterans and targets them for POS. A veterans' representative described their provision of POS in workforce services as always giving a veteran priority if space is limited in resume workshops, certification classes, or other activities held at the AJC or to which they refer customers. For example, the AJC holds small resume classes and a veteran will get priority over a nonveteran for a spot in those classes. Forklift certification training takes approximately 30 to 35 customers each month through the AJC and veterans receive priority for that certification, which New Jersey requires of people who work in warehouses. Because the workshops and training are by appointment, and spots are filled from a general sign-in list, nonveteran customers are never aware that they have been bumped to a later workshop or training because a veteran

has received priority. It was not clear how frequently workshops and trainings implemented POS. However, most veterans who are eligible use their G.I. Bill or vocational rehabilitation benefits and do not pursue other training through the AJC until those benefits are exhausted.

A designated workstation at the AJC provides priority for UI services; veterans can file UI claims there. An 8.5-by-11-inch sign at this workstation states "Attention Veterans Filing for Unemployment: Priority Service for Recently Separated Veterans — Use the phone in this phone booth!" This workstation has been set aside so that veterans do not have to wait in line for a telephone with all customers seeking to file for UI. As part of POS, veterans' representatives will also advocate for veterans who have issues with their UI claims.

Veterans' representatives indicated that veterans and eligible spouses often request specific staff because of their comfort level with those staff. They may ask the receptionist to contact that representative when they come to the AJC. A representative indicated that some veterans believe incorrectly that only a veterans' representative can serve them.

Another veterans' representative indicated that the general policy on referring POS-eligible veterans to programs is to accompany them through the process of registering for the referred program to ensure that no problems arise. The representatives will work with veterans as long as feasible to ensure that they receive POS for programs to which they are referred, when the services are not provided by the AJC. The representative described staff's role as advocates for veterans obtaining POS, and in ensuring that military income and benefits are properly applied in determining program eligibility. Staff also indicated that the POS provided to veterans is not always explicitly stated as such. It is presented to veterans as what they need and as services for which they are eligible. Veterans are told what they are eligible for as opportunities are explored—a representative described this as a constant matching process. For example, veterans' representatives will advocate for veterans receiving TANF, which requires 30 hours per week in a work-related activity. The representatives will provide extra assistance in helping the veteran find employment.

According to a veterans' representative, Wagner-Peyser staff are generally responsible for receiving and screening potential job orders in the Newark AJC. If employers approach the veterans' representatives, the representatives will refer employers to Wagner-Peyser staff who proceed with setting up the job order in AOSOS. The job order is set up in a suspense category, so that veterans' representatives can search for recently created jobs in that category. The job order notes if the employer specifically requested a veteran. Some federal jobs are reserved for veterans and some provide additional civil service examination points for veterans. The representatives then search among their veterans for those with qualifications that match the new job opening. Job orders are kept in suspense for 24 hours for veterans before they are released for all customers. Representatives indicated that a strong emphasis is placed on ensuring that all relevant data fields in AOSOS are populated and updated for veterans so that when these job matches are conducted, veterans who are actively looking and have relevant experience will be recognized as potential candidates for open positions. The focus also is on matching veterans to careers of interest rather than merely jobs.

Technically, the suspense category can remain for 72 hours, but the representatives work to release the suspense in just 24 hours. Periodically, some nonveteran staff make referrals to nonveteran customers before the 24-hour period is up and the job order has been released from suspense status. One representative felt that there was not a significant advantage to a 24-hour

hold in that it only allowed the veteran to submit his or her resume a little bit ahead of others; the employer was still likely to view all resumes before deciding whom to call for interviews.

The job matches produce computerized lists and the veterans' representatives designate individuals on the list for automated telephone calls about the job opening. Newark's integrated voice response (IVR) system links to these lists and includes scripted calls from the representatives for various purposes, including for job openings, so the veterans' representatives can very quickly generate calls regarding the job openings. The scripted call references the specific job opening number and asks the veteran to call back for more information and to obtain a referral card. Representatives described the AOSOS matches as very detailed and the IVR process as very quick and easy to use in transmitting information about job openings to veterans. When the veteran calls back, the representative can provide more details about the job and better assess the veteran's fit. Staff noted however that they do not have answering machines, so will miss the callbacks if they are not at their desks. If the veteran pursues the opening, he or she brings the referral card provided by the veterans' representative and presents it at the interview. The referral card shows that the candidate is a veteran.

More tailored IVR scripts for job fairs and other dated events must be done well in advance and approved by off-site managers. Staff recommended that veterans' representatives have more control over creating tailored IVR scripts for specific events.

Veterans in the focus group were familiar with all the ways that the AJC provides POS. The focus group participants felt by and large that the veteran identification process and POS worked well at the AJC, after they saw a veterans' representative. However, some of the veterans indicated that not all staff in the AJC are knowledgeable about POS; the veterans indicated that more widespread POS knowledge would better identify veterans at the reception desk. Some of the focus group participants who had been AJC customers over a longer period of time drew a distinction between longer-term reception staff, who knew to ask, and newer staff, who could benefit from training on how to identify veterans and provide POS on intake. Some participants felt the issue was more pervasive, that AJC staff not only lacked knowledge of POS or veterans' issues, but did not demonstrate concern about serving customers in general.

3. Self-Service Materials and Systems

The Newark AJC provides telephones, fax machines, a copy machine, scanners, computers, and printers in a communal self-service area. The area is utilitarian and devoid of information regarding veterans' POS, although a small sign indicates that POS is provided for use of the UI telephone. When customers occupy all computers in the main resource area, veterans can use the computers in the multi-access resource room. Even when there are workshops in the resource room, veterans can use the computers quietly if other self-service computers are in use. This room includes a telephone for conducting outreach to employers. However, staff do not recall needing to implement POS for the self-service resources in general.

A veterans' representative will periodically assist veterans navigating the self-service computers. Several veterans in the focus group indicated that they used all the available self-service tools and appreciated the assistance of the veterans' representatives with the computers as needed.

4. Customer Service and Reporting Systems

The Newark AJC uses the AOSOS case management system for tracking customer registration and services. Veterans' data are accessible to any veterans' representative, so that veterans can be served throughout New Jersey without creating new records in the system. When registering customers, predetermined significant barriers to employment are identified and tracked through contact with the veteran. A veterans' representative indicated that AOSOS really ties the representatives to the AJC and that in Newark that is a positive tie.

In addition to AOSOS, the AJC uses Jobs4Jersey.com, a web-based system developed by the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development for use by job seekers and employers. This comprehensive system is similar to Monster.com and other job search systems. It provides information on POS, veterans' services, and links to other resources for veterans. As a first step to registering, customers create an extensive resume, which a representative described as much more extensive than the AOSOS resume system. When customers have created their Jobs4Jersey resume, their information is available for employers to search. Several veterans in the focus group had seen Jobs4Jersey advertisements in numerous locations and had tried using the website. However, veterans in the focus group described Jobs4Jersey as frustrating to use and "a waste of time." They said that the tool sends users to numerous different pages and they feared uploading information through Jobs4Jersey because it might link to the wrong place. One veteran felt it had viruses.

The Newark AJC conducts case management on veterans for one year; staff ask agencies to provide progress reports on services received. One veterans' representative indicated that each representative tracks his or her own veterans. With more staffing, a dedicated tracking unit in the AJC would conduct this tracking. A representative indicated that veterans with employment barriers generally receive a 30 day follow-up, but during the winter of 2011–2012, the AJC manager requested weekly follow-ups to ensure adequate service to veterans. Anecdotally, a representative reported that veterans who receive a training grant tend to be more successful with it than nonveterans who receive the same grant. And the AJC does not tend to hear from veterans who have received G.I. Bill benefits; it is expected that they are succeeding with those benefits. Staff noted that veterans who receive these benefits have prior work experience through the military as well as potential family obligations that lead them to be more serious about pursuing and succeeding in these opportunities. AJC management indicated that veterans' outcomes also tend to be better than nonveterans' outcomes because of the AJC's higher emphasis on service to veterans.

To protect veterans' privacy, the representative indicated that detailed case management notes are generally not reviewed outside the team; however, on a quarterly basis aggregate counts of veterans, services provided, and other data are produced in a standard report format that replicates Wagner-Peyser veterans' reporting at a micro level. This format provides quick comparison of, for example, employment for recent veterans compared with the AJC's target for that rate. The state veterans' coordinator reviews these reports and veterans' representatives indicated that they are reviewed at the federal level as well. It was reported that the AJC also cross-references AJC performance with state UI and other data to monitor performance and, at a detailed level, to identify potential fraud among employed customers looking for training. Most respondents view this intensive monitoring as very helpful. Feedback is provided if service to veterans does not meet or exceed expectations. Veterans' representatives are also involved in monitoring veterans who exit VA vocational rehabilitation.

C. Translation of Military Experience and Skills

A veterans' representative indicated that obtaining relevant civilian licenses is now a critical aspect of translating military experience and skills. It is no longer sufficient to translate a veteran's military skills and experience to comparable civilian occupations; veterans need civilian licenses to obtain comparable jobs in the private sector. The veterans' representative indicated that staff in the Newark AJC in general have a good understanding of how to translate military skills and experience into comparable civilian occupations; they cited the AJC manager being a former LVER staff person as a positive influence in that regard.

According to one veterans' representative, most of the veterans who come to the Newark AJC are middle-aged or older and left the military long ago; therefore, they translated their military experience long before coming to the Newark AJC. This veterans' representative cited the case of a veteran he helped get college credit for his life experience.

Veterans in the focus group (primarily younger veterans) who had their resumes prepared with the assistance of the Newark AJC described generally positive experiences. They said that AJC staff used a range of approaches to translation, including online tools and specific discussion about resume wording. Some veterans found the process very helpful, whereas others in the focus group said that their translated resumes yielded undesirable job openings during computer searches.

The Jobs4Jersey website, launched about six months before the site visit, includes functionality for translating military skills and experience to civilian occupations. An AJC staff person indicated that all staff received training on how to use Jobs4Jersey and were asked to promote its use. The staff person indicated that it is especially helpful for staff who lack a military background and vocabulary.

D. Challenges in Implementing POS

A veterans' representative indicated that although there is no challenge to providing veterans with POS in the Newark AJC, identifying veterans is a challenge given their reluctance to self-identify. The representative attributed this to veterans not wanting or not thinking they need additional services, or receiving similar services from the VA. Pride might prevent some veterans from identifying themselves as eligible for POS. In addition, if a veteran has not been unemployed, he or she might not have been to an AJC nor had the opportunity to learn about POS in workforce services.

Veterans who participated in the focus group conducted in the Newark AJC were generally happy with their AJC service yet had mixed experiences when they first came to the AJC. Some were asked immediately about their veterans' status and others were not; some saw signs about veteran POS and others did not. At the time of the site visit there was virtually no signage regarding veterans' services or POS in the public areas of the AJC. By contrast, the veterans' representatives' area of the AJC had thorough signage, with abundant information posted regarding veterans' services and POS.

In general, AJC staff and representatives in Newark did not have a strong understanding of the federal guidance for POS-eligible veterans and spouses. Their approach was veteran-centric, to provide POS to all veterans, but the 180-day definition of veteran was often misunderstood to

be relevant for POS and appears to be used to identify eligible veterans when reviewing completed AJC registration forms. In addition, New Jersey has its own, fairly stringent definition of veteran that requires service in a foreign war for eligibility for certain programs. However, all respondents indicated they work with veterans and provide POS regardless of a veteran's length of service and other criteria.

A challenge cited by respondents was New Jersey's lack of a coherent, highly visible public message about veterans' POS. A veterans' representative suggested better use of public access television, public service announcements, billboards, and advertising, and clearly indicating that even employed veterans can receive POS in the AJCs. Staff also recommended inserts in benefits mailings as a vehicle for better disseminating information regarding POS. Ideally, improved public messaging about POS would start at the federal level.

AJC management noted that it would be beneficial to have more staff, and more veterans on staff to serve veterans. In the view of AJC management, that tends to work best for veterans. Lags in telephone and computer upgrades were also mentioned as challenges to implementing POS in Newark. One veterans' representative noted that the lack of voice mail on staff telephones is a serious impediment to providing services and POS to veterans.

Veterans in the focus group also identified challenges to POS implementation. Some veterans expressed dissatisfaction with POS compared with priority for jobs, which they would prefer. Some in the group had experienced discrimination from potential employers due to their reservist status, which causes employers to fear they would leave work. They saw no real benefit to their veterans' status even for federal jobs, which have hiring preferences for veterans. Several focus group participants indicated that they feel as if they are on their own with their job search as soon as they leave the AJC.

A veterans' representative noted that some veterans who have recently transitioned out of the military, especially after longer terms of service, have unrealistic expectations for job and salary comparability in the civilian market. Staff also noted that the low skill level of some customers is a challenge.

E. Promising Practices in POS Implementation

Promising practices identified in Newark and discussed throughout this report include the following:

- Promising practices to improve POS procedures:
  - Distribution of job holds within 24 hours even though a 72-hour limit applies
  - Positive recruitment for employers which includes organizing seminars with potential job candidates and administering skills assessments for employers interested in hiring veterans
  - Focus on veteran advocacy; referring veterans to supportive services, VA, and other providers in addition to POS for workforce services
  - Veterans' representatives as a resource for all AJC staff
- Promising practices to improve veterans' awareness of POS:

- Comprehensive outreach and veterans' advocacy as a way to attract more veterans to the AJC

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Further Guidance and Dissemination of Guidance

As discussed, AJC staff and veterans' representatives in Newark appeared to have detailed knowledge of state and VA guidance regarding veterans, and strong familiarity with veterans' programs, but did not express familiarity with the details of the federal guidance on POS for veterans and eligible spouses. Therefore, the key recommendation is for more frequent and consistent training on federal POS guidelines for veterans' representatives and staff in the Newark AJC. Ideally this training would lead to adjustments in the intake, registration, and service process that would better reflect the federal POS guidance, such as identifying veterans with appropriate length of service on the registration form.

B. Outreach and Veterans' Services

As discussed, some Newark AJC respondents recommended comprehensive advertising and communications at the federal and state levels to increase veterans' awareness of POS. The state website could better target veterans and produce materials for the AJCs on veterans' services and POS, as well as on the tax and other advantages for employers to hire veterans. Communications should target female veterans who rarely visit the AJC. More basically, representatives would like to have voice mail on their telephones so that they do not lose calls from veterans and other agencies when the veterans' representatives are not at their desks. In addition, staff recommended that veterans' representatives have more control over creating tailored IVR scripts to reach veterans regarding specific events.

Veterans in the focus group also recommended that in the AJC itself, the communications and identification processes be improved so that a customer is always asked if he or she is a veteran, and scan cards are always programmed to identify if the customer is a veteran. Veterans suggested that a retraining for reception and intake staff might improve the current situation, because longer-term staff seemed to be better at identifying veterans at reception and intake.

A veterans' representative recommended redesigning TAP. For Newark representatives specifically, it is inconvenient to participate in TAP at New Jersey bases. But more broadly, the recommendation was made because separating service members do not appear to retain much of what they are told in TAP. The representatives are in touch with TAP instructors about what information is conveyed, yet new veterans often claim not to have received that information. They recommended a less didactic, more engaging format for TAP.

A veterans' representative recommended that all transitioning service members be required to register for services at their nearest AJC. Many veterans associate the AJC with unemployment and lower-skilled workers, but this approach will ensure that a veterans' representative will assist them in their transition to the civilian workforce. Veterans in the focus group would like a clearer route to accessing available federal, state, and local government jobs, and a clearer understanding of the training needed to fill available jobs. It was suggested that this targeted approach would make most efficient use of the G.I. Bill benefits.

Focus group participants would like better screening for the job contacts and postings they receive, in terms of whether the employer would hire a veteran who pursued the opening. The

veterans often feel as if they pursue openings "for nothing" and a call back or explanation at a minimum would be helpful. Although one veterans' representative noted that some veterans might have unrealistic expectations for the civilian market, another noted that in the current economy, there was a noticeable lack of attractive openings for veterans. AJC management recommended exploring more incentives for hiring veterans, such as funding for on-the-job training or wage sharing as well as the existing tax credit. For veterans interested in pursuing the G.I. Bill, AJC management recommends creating partnerships with private employers in the veterans' areas of study and subsidizing part-time employment through the G.I. Bill to incentivize employers to take on veterans while they are in school and create better connections to the workforce.

Veterans in the focus group also recommended a resume writing class geared toward veterans and transportation assistance during their job searches. The transportation assistance could be in the form of a bus voucher or veterans running a shuttle service for other veterans. That class, or a separate group, could also serve as a support group among the veterans served at any given time in the AJC. This group would be an ongoing transition assistance and support group. Many of the veterans in the Newark focus group did not receive services from the TAP because of their discharge status or they left the military long ago, yet they need the information provided in TAP. Alternatively, these individuals could be included in TAP.

Finally, AJC management and veterans' representatives would like to increase the number of veterans' representatives currently in the AJC to better serve veterans. There is concern about the number of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and the AJC's ability to adequately provide POS. Staff recommended that there be wider acknowledgement of the veterans' identification card, which the VA provides to veterans who have other than dishonorable discharges as a form of identification—possession of a VIC provides veterans reduced bus fare and other benefits.

APPENDIX I

STUDY SITE PROFILE: TOLEDO, OHIO

I. DESCRIPTION OF STUDY SITE

A. Population and Local Area Description

Ohio, with about 11.5 million residents, is the seventh-largest state by population. About 8.9 million people, or 76.7 percent of the population, are ages 18 or older. The median age is 39.1 years. About 876,000 people, or 9.9 percent of the adult population, are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. By race, 82.9 percent of Ohioans are white, 12.1 percent are black, 1.7 percent are Asian, and the rest are of other races. Hispanics, who can be of any race, make up 3.2 percent of the population of Ohio. Of those ages 25 and older, 9.2 percent have earned a graduate or professional degree and 15.4 percent have a bachelor's degree. Of those ages 25 and older, 7.8 percent have an associate's degree and 34.8 percent graduated from high school or received an equivalency certificate or degree.

As of April 2012, the unemployment rate in Ohio was 7.4 percent, not significantly different from the national rate of 8.1 percent but significantly lower than its rate a year earlier, 8.8 percent . Over the past decade, unemployment in Ohio fluctuated around 6.0 percent for several years before beginning a steady increase in mid-2008. It peaked and held at 10.6 percent in the second half of 2009 and has steadily declined since.

Toledo is in the northwest portion of the state, at the western end of Lake Erie and bordering Michigan. Founded in 1833 and located on the Miami and Erie Canal and the rail line between New York and Chicago, the city grew quickly and had an industrial focus on glass, automobile parts manufacturing, and auto assembly. After many plant closures and increased automation in those that remained, efforts were made in the first decade of this century to build a green industry focus, but several of those firms closed and the positions they had available were not well matched with the characteristics of local unemployed people. The 180th Fighter Wing and 112th Fighter Squadron of the Ohio Air National Guard are based at the Toledo Airport in Swanton, Ohio. Its primary mission is to provide combat units, combat support units, and personnel for active Air Force duty. It must be available for rapid deployment anywhere in the world and to support local and state authorities in the event of a disaster.

Local Workforce Investment Area 9 of the Ohio Workforce System covers Toledo, the fourth most populous city in Ohio and the seat of Lucas County. A full-service American Job Center (AJC) called The Source is located downtown in one of the highest-poverty areas of the county. Since opening as a county facility in 2004, the number of customers served in the resource room has increased from an average of 597 to 3,800 a month.

Customers of The Source in program year 2011 were somewhat demographically different than the population of the county in the 2000 Census. Customers were 25 percentage points more likely to be black and 32 percentage points less likely to be white. They were also 9 points more likely to be male. In terms of educational attainment, customers were 8 percentage points more likely to have a high school diploma or GED and 4 points more likely to have dropped out of high school and were 14 percentage points less likely to have a bachelors degree or higher.

Veterans are described by staff as often being more disciplined and reliable than nonveterans, more likely to have been through training and have a marketable skill, and more

willing to follow the advice and carry through the steps they are given. Younger veterans are described as being particularly computer savvy.

B. Local Workforce System

1. Organization

The state Office of Workforce Development (OWD) is part of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). The OWD interprets federal and state law; acts as the primary policymaker; maintains the Ohio Means Jobs website; and administers federal programs that create a system of employment services, hiring support, labor market information, and tax credits. The Ohio Means Jobs website facilitates matching of employers with workers.

The state is organized into 20 workforce investment areas, which vary greatly in area and population. Each area structures, names, and markets its system as it sees fit, but has at least one full-service, level 2 center. There are 30 full-service and 60 satellite AJCs across the state. The local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) in each area is responsible for implementing and overseeing the local AJCs and administering the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), usually by hiring another organization to do so. The local boards develop memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between themselves and all required AJC partners, outlining their respective roles and responsibilities for implementing WIA, mission statements, and resource and cost-sharing. Before a shift toward local control following the implementation of WIA, private operators were not hired to provide job services; various types of services were dispersed across a greater number of individual offices. In the transition to WIB-controlled areas, a variety of services were brought together in the AJCs so customers need visit only one place and would "never find the wrong door." At the same time, application for Unemployment Insurance (UI) was shifted to a fully online and telephone-based process in an attempt to create a focus on education, training, and employment in the AJCs. UI recipients are mandated to register in Sharing Careers and Opportunities in Training Information (SCOTI) and are encouraged to come to an AJC for an assessment and to participate in Unemployment Compensation Reemployment Services (UCRS) administered by state Wagner-Peyser staff.

The AJC that is the focus of this study is called The Source. It is a full-service center located in Toledo that serves all of Lucas County. The Board of Lucas County Commissioners oversees the workforce system and represents the local governing authorities. The county WIB is designated to work in partnership with the board to establish policies and oversee the system. The WIB has contracted with the NetWORK Division of the Zepf Center, a nonprofit mental health service provider, to operate The Source. It has done so since the current structure was implemented in 2004, winning recompetitions for the contract every two years. The operator is responsible for administration and management of core services, coordination with partners, customer intake and referral, data collection and dissemination, and other activities.

There is a mix of Employment Services (ES), WIA, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Veterans' Service Commission, and other providers at the site. There are 10 required partners to the MOU, including the Lucas County Workforce Development Agency, the Lucas County and Ohio departments of Job and Family Services, the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission, Experience Works, various educational and training organizations, and other groups. Staff at The Source represent a mix of programs and funding sources. There are 12 staff from Lucas County Workforce Development, 10 state Wagner-Peyser staff, 6 veterans'

representatives from the ODJFS, 12 staff from the AJC operator, and several others from various programs. In all, 21 partners are on site.

In recent years, funding cuts have forced reductions in staff from various programs and some programs no longer collocate staff in the AJC. When the building first opened in 2004, there were 30 to 35 staff, many of whom were from different programs and collocated on a full- or part-time basis. Peak staffing was about 125 individuals and is currently down to about 70. The cuts have not been evenly distributed across programs. The TANF program has had its budget cut by $20 million since 2007, contributing to significant staff reductions, whereas the Veterans' Service Commission, which is funded through the county general fund, has experienced some budget cuts but has remained relatively stable.

2. Serving Veterans

The state is organized into seven regions, each under the oversight of a veterans' program manager. This individual not only works with the veterans representatives but also with educating other staff members about providing services to veterans. For several years, there were only three veterans' program managers throughout the state, which left the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVER) staff in the AJCs with minimal guidance and support. This has since been increased to one for each region. The veteran's program manager whose area includes Toledo oversees a 17-county region covering most of northwest Ohio. Ten DVOP specialists and two LVER staff work in this area, some covering single counties and others covering multiple counties. Three DVOP and one LVER staff are in Lucas County at The Source. Their cubicles are at the opposite end of the main room from the entrance, front desk, and copy machines and at the same end as the library and the computers reserved for veterans. In the two years he has been in this role, the veterans' program manager has been evaluating the condition of the tools and training in place for veterans' representatives, how the representatives understand and carry out their duties, how they record participating services, and other issues. When the veterans' program manager has found inconsistencies or errors, he has taken steps to retrain staff or otherwise remedy the causes. Staff come to him with technical questions and he is able to either immediately provide answers or look into the question and come back with an answer later. The level of the questions indicates to him that staff have a good understanding of priority of service (POS).

Currently, about 7 percent of customers at The Source self-identify as veterans. In the first three quarters of this program year, from July 2011 to February 2012, the share of enrolled customers receiving adult and dislocated worker services at The Source who were veterans was 15 percent, compared with 7.7 percent of those served in the rest of the state.

With some regularity, veterans who are homeless or who have recently been released from jail and do not have a place to stay come to The Source. After the standard in-processing procedure, these veterans are taken directly to see a veterans' representative rather than being referred for a later call-back as they would be if their barrier had been of a different kind. Efforts are made to begin serving them one on one immediately, because they might face difficulties in returning and the goal is to serve them as soon as possible. The veteran is typically referred to the Veterans' Service Commission or the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) homeless program to have immediate needs met. The Veterans' Service Commission is located on site at The Source and provides services such as rent and utility payments, transportation assistance, and food vouchers to veterans. Referrals between this organization and ES, WIA, and other

partners in the AJC are common. Occasionally, referrals are done through connections the veterans' representatives have developed in the community. Development of such connections was stressed as one of the most important activities of the LVER staff, though they are usually used to find employment opportunities rather than housing and transportation. For example, a homeless veteran came in the day before Thanksgiving in 2011 when most businesses were already closed for the holiday. Someone from The Source called a hotel he knew to be veteran-owned, explained the situation and that there were no funds available to pay, and asked if the hotel would house the veteran. The hotel's owner agreed. The staff member next called a taxi company he has worked with that has hired several veterans and arranged a free ride to the hotel. Although this was not within the official scope of the AJC's duties, it was viewed as the right thing to do and could be done with little time or expenditure due to the relationships already developed.

3. Processes

A customer entering The Source is welcomed at the front desk and asked if he or she has been there before, is registered on the Ohio Means Jobs website, and is a veteran. Website registration is completed, if necessary, and a membership form is filled out. This form collects demographic, educational attainment, employment, and income information; the reason for the visit; and current needs, barriers, and services being received. The customer also signs in on the touch-screen kiosk, which uses the customer's four-digit personal identification number (PIN) and month and date of birth to verify identity.

New customers meet with a triage worker for a basic needs assessment and to be introduced to the AJC. A file is created for the customer (the form might be of a specific color to indicate the person is a veteran, youth, or an older or displaced worker) and the customer attends an orientation. Each of these colored folders contains the general materials needed by all new customers as well as those specific to that particular client group. This colored folder system has had several benefits. It ensures that all needed materials for a client are present and that clients are not overloaded with materials about programs for which they do not qualify. It also eases identification of various types of customers from across the room and makes finding and counting the various file types easier.

The blue veterans' folder contains a veteran referral form that is completed during the initial intake. It asks for additional information to determine if a veteran has barriers that require referral to a DVOP specialist, what benefits he or she currently receives, and for details of his or her service and separation that will affect eligibility for various programs. The back of the sheet has a list of services the veteran can indicate interest in receiving. If no major barriers are found, the veteran is not referred to a DVOP specialist but does continue to receive POS. If the veteran has barriers that suggest he or she would be best served by working with a DVOP specialist, or if the veteran requests to work with a DVOP specialist, the referral sheet is placed in a box in the area where the veterans' representatives' offices are located. A DVOP specialist follows up with the client by telephone or email, usually in the next three to five days, if it is not possible to see the client the same day. At least three attempts are made to contact the client. In the past, a veteran could walk in and ask to talk with the representative with whom he or she had been working, but staff reductions and turnover and an increase in the number of veterans seen now means that veterans have to schedule appointments in advance and that they are encouraged to work with nonveterans' representative staff when appropriate.

When the veteran meets with the DVOP specialist, additional questions on period and duration of service, type and date of discharge, presence and degree of service-connected disability, and other service-related questions are asked. The DVOP specialist manages the client's case, makes referrals, suggests trainings, and takes other actions to get the veteran job-ready. When this is accomplished, the veteran's name goes on a weekly report for the LVER staff person, who then looks at the veteran's resume and tries to find appropriate interviews. Three days a week, the LVER staff person goes to organizations such as the chamber of commerce, social service agencies, and the United Way to let them know about The Source and the services it provides. He also tries to visit two employers on each of these days to develop and maintain relationships, learn about upcoming openings, tell them about tax credits and other incentives for hiring veterans, and market job-ready veterans to the employers. Some of the employers now call or email the LVER staff person to let him know they have job openings and to ask if he has any veterans he can send.

Customers can engage in self-service activities, attend seminars, use computer-based tutorials and assessments, work one on one with staff, or be referred to partners or other agencies. The business services team works with employers by obtaining job listings; providing skill testing and upgrading; conducting mass recruitments and job fairs; and providing information on tax credits, business loans, and other topics. Customer satisfaction surveys are available in the resource room to obtain feedback from customers on interactions with staff, satisfaction with seminars, and overall impressions of the AJC.

C. AMVETS

American Veterans (AMVETS) was founded in 1944 and was chartered by Congress in 1947. The charter has been amended over the years to include those who served in more recent conflicts and AMVETS membership is now open to anyone who is currently serving or who honorably served in the U.S. Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserves, from World War II to the present. The organization is involved in advocacy activities, visiting hospitalized veterans, supporting community organizations, and other activities. It awards $40,000 worth of scholarships each year to high school seniors, Reserve Officer Training Corps students, and veterans pursuing higher education. A network of national service officers in 39 states who are accredited by the VA provide advice and assistance with compensation claims at no charge to the veteran. In a recent year they processed more than 24,000 claims, resulting in about $400 million in compensation.

AMVETS Ohio has an additional focus on employment and training. It runs a network of 60 career centers that provide job search assistance, resume writing, career assessment tools, training, and licensing and certification assistance. The website Ohiovetscan.com connects employers and job-seeking veterans through a board for posting job openings and resumes. During military service, skills are often developed that must be credentialed or licensed to be practiced in civilian employment. Military credentials or experience are generally not accepted or are not accepted at the skill level that has actually been obtained. AMVETS will help pay for any required testing, certification, or license fees needed for civilian employment. AMVETS has partnered with Mindleaders, a developer of Internet-based training, to offer hundreds of Internet-based courses, largely in computer, technical, health, and safety fields. People can take as many courses as they want in a year but they can take only one at a time.

All of these courses and services are available free to eligible veterans and service members who are residents of Ohio, belong to an Ohio AMVETS post, or are members of an Ohio-based unit. Career services are also provided free of charge to spouses and children of troops who are residents of Ohio when the service member is on active duty outside of the state. These restrictions are in place because Ohio AMVETS career center services are funded entirely by contributions from members of Ohio AMVETS posts.

Many of the national service officers are AMVETS members who volunteer in that capacity. Since 2010, some have been AmeriCorps members in the Career Services for Veterans AmeriCorps program, many of whom are veterans themselves. Partnering with AmeriCorps has enabled the expansion of the program both in geographic area and in the number of staff available at a location. Some AMVETS career centers are located at AMVETS posts, whereas others are housed in a variety of locations, such as schools, Volunteers of America offices, and Veteran Service Commission offices. In addition to helping customers on site, national service officers conduct outreach to individuals and organizations likely to have connections with potential customers. The Toledo officer has attended chapter meetings of Vietnam Veterans of America and Heroes in Action to introduce himself and provide information on the resources he has available, and has obtained several referrals as a result. When not conducting outreach or working with a customer, he often combs Internet job postings and sends appropriate ones to customers with whom he works.

Relationships between the AMVETS career centers and the AJCs vary. It was noted that there is a competitive feeling between some AMVETS centers and AJCs, and little constructive contact, whereas others partner and refer customers back and forth to provide veterans the best array of services. A relationship is developing between an AJC staff member and an AMVETS AmeriCorps worker in Toledo that is increasing communication between their sites and resulting in referrals.

AMVETS career centers have expanded outside of Ohio to Chicago, Illinois; Nashville, Tennessee; and Buffalo, New York, in recent years. In 2011, Activision, maker of "Call of Duty," a first-person combat simulation video game, awarded grants from its endowment to assist with veterans' reintegration to civilian life. AMVETS received a $100,000 grant, which it will use to help open seven new career centers across the country.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A. Awareness and Usefulness of Federal Guidance

Training and Employment Guidance letter (TEGL) 10-09, Training and Employment Notice (TEN) 15-10, Veterans' Program Letter (VPL) 07-09, the Final Rule, and other documents were used to draft Ohio's Workforce Investment Act Policy Letter (WIAPL) 10-07. The WIAPL clearly defined terms and explained eligibility requirements, implementation methods, and reporting requirements. It laid out exactly what the AJCs should and should not do in simple and direct terms. References to the federal documents were supplied at the end of the document. It is this state guidance that was most familiar to AJC staff at all levels. The federal guidance that seemed to be most familiar, TEGL 10-09 and VPL 07-09, were often described as confusing and needing to be interpreted for staff. TEN 15-10 and its user-friendly layout were not specifically mentioned and staff did not seem to be familiar with it. Managers were more likely than front line staff to report having read the federal guidance, though all staff seemed to be knowledgeable about what POS is and how it is to be provided.

The ODJFS maintains a website with "e-manuals" where all applicable regulations and manuals are posted and available for reference. It is sortable by program and subject and is searchable by keywords. The site also contains a forms center from which all standard ODJFS forms and brochures can be printed or ordered. When the state guidance came out, it was accompanied by the flyer now included with the intake packets and some of the notices now posted on the walls, all available from the forms center.

When first hired, all staff go through a standard training regimen that includes POS, serving veterans, and when to send veterans to a veterans' representative. Veterans' representatives attend case management training at the National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI) within 18 months of hire and also receive state- and region-specific training. The NVTI training is valued because it is broad and focused on the law; the state training is valued because it is tailored to the specifics of Ohio's system. Staff can request to repeat the state training if considerable time has passed since they initially took it or if they feel a need for a refresher. Managers can also require that staff members retake the training. Training for all staff is also conducted on an ongoing basis; recent topics have included POS and social media.

The veterans' program manager engages in continuous efforts to increase understanding of the veterans' program throughout the region. Understanding currently varies across AJCs, with staff at The Source being well informed and involved in the veterans' program manager's training of staff at some other sites. He communicates with staff before his visit to assess the situation on site and identify areas of concern on which to focus. He emails AJC managers and directors regularly to ask if they have specific training requests. He also offers to give short, impromptu trainings to staff when he is visiting a center and is asked a question or notices something being done incorrectly or less than optimally. On his planned training visits he is sometimes accompanied by a highly experienced, long-tenured veterans' representative who also provides training. Before his hire, there was a period when there were only three veterans' program managers. This came to be viewed as insufficient for the geographic area that had to be covered and he is attempting to fill some of the training voids created during that time.

When staff have questions about POS or other veteran-related issues, they are more likely to ask a veterans' representative or the veterans' program manager than they are to refer back to written guidance. This could be because they are familiar with the basics and have detailed questions about specific situations, such as how a separation or divorce affects spousal eligibility for POS. It could also be because the team has a strong degree of cohesion and the veterans' program manager actively encourages questions and responds positively to them. When staff do refer to the written guidance, they tend to refer to that created by the state.

Two sets of meetings occur every month at The Source. The AJC operator, veterans' representative staff, and staff from all partner agencies meet every third Friday at 10:00 a.m. to discuss current issues. From 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. on those afternoons, the resource room is closed and in-house training takes place, with partners informing one another of what is happening in their programs and training on topics, such as POS, that apply across programs. POS is covered in this in-house training at least annually. Additionally, staff attend training provided by ODJFS that explains the state's interpretation of various regulations and generally involves working through case studies. When staff members attend off-site training, such as at NVTI, they are encouraged to share what they have learned with other staff members.

B. Implementation of POS

1. Veterans' Awareness of POS

Because there are no major military installations in the area, there is not a steady stream of newly separated veterans coming to the AJC. Most newly separated veterans seen by staff grew up in the area and are moving back after their service. A large share of the veterans seen at the AJCs are older and have lived in the area for some time. Few have been through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) recently; therefore, there is a low degree of familiarity with POS.

Prominent signs in the reception area and on the front desk explain POS and it is discussed again during intake with customers who identify as veterans. The blue veterans' folder contains a handout on what POS is and what kind of service an eligible veteran can expect. Those who meet with a veterans' representative hear about POS again in that meeting. Staff reported that only rarely have they encountered customers who mistakenly think they are eligible for POS and that explanations of the requirements have been a sufficient solution.

a. Outreach and Referrals

The Source is located in downtown Toledo at an easily accessible location on a major bus line. AJCs in some of the more rural locations tend to be located outside of town, creating transportation issues for potential customers.

Staff at The Source engage in a variety of forms of outreach. The LVER staff person has established a monthly outreach plan with frequent visits to sites that have proven to be good sources of contact with veterans and spouses, quarterly visits to sites that are hit or miss, and room to add new sites or events—such as stand downs—as they arise. Some outreach to veterans mirrors outreach to other customers in that staff visit employers, schools, chambers of commerce, and community organizations to make presentations about services. Other outreach is specialized and veteran-centric: Veteran Service Organizations, stand downs, and the VA clinic and homeless program, for example. The VA homeless program at the clinic in Toledo is a

branch of the main program at the hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The clinic is located on the other side of town and is difficult to reach, so the person who runs that program visits the AJC every Tuesday from 10:00 a.m. to noon to meet with the veterans. Outreach by the AJC to these various programs results in direct contact with potential customers, increased knowledge of AJC recourses, and referrals in both directions. The Source also offers a rapid-response service team that meets with employees affected by large-scale layoffs or plant closings to describe the services available. A veterans' representative is usually part of the team that visits the site in order to tell any veterans present about the services available to them. Staff also have "street cards" with contact and program information that they can hand to individuals with whom they make informal contact, with whom they are not yet working, or with whom they are ready to work.

Once a month, The Source hosts a mini job fair focusing on a particular industry, such as health care, food service, or manufacturing. There is also an Employer of the Day program in which employers come to The Source for the day and recruit. Larger job fairs held off site can have as many as 100 employers, including the large, well-known ones in the area, and up to 5,000 job seekers.

Referrals to The Source from training providers are frequent. Generally the provider has a customer who wants to enroll but who needs tuition money, so the provider calls and the AJC sends an information packet. The cover letter on the packet explains the current availability of funding and that it is not an entitlement program, and gives contact information of the person the customer should follow up with at The Source. The materials outline core and intensive training, the process for getting approved for training, the demand list of occupations for which individual training contracts can be written, and the list of locally and state-approved training providers. A page explaining POS is also included. Ohio was awarded a National Emergency Grant for On-the-Job Training (NEGOJT), some of which is being used by veteran clients. Individuals receiving UI are required to register with an AJC and conduct job search activities, so they are automatically referred. Many of the social service and community organizations that staff members conduct outreach to refer individuals to The Source as well.

Because so many organizations are collocated at The Source, referrals for education, training, social services, and many other needs can be made in house. About 100 off-site referrals are made each month to resources not available on site, such as sending individuals with disabilities to the Ohio Rehabilitation Service Commission, calling Crisis Intervention for people with acute mental health needs, and sending veterans to the VA homeless program, AMVETS training resources, the VA regional office, and others.

b. TAP

Not having any major military installations in its region, The Source is not involved in TAP. Staff do occasionally see transitioning service members who are going through TAP in another region and are thinking about relocating to northwest Ohio. Staff members help these individuals learn about the local economy and the job opportunities there and assist in tailoring their resumes accordingly.

c. Media and Signage

The Source has signage and displays beginning at the lobby of the building and continuing throughout its space notifying customers of POS and making veterans feel welcome. Signs in the waiting area, on the registration desk, and next to the touch-screen check-in kiosk are highly visible and encourage veterans and eligible spouses to identify themselves. A description of POS and how it is applied is clearly explained on the signage. Staff indicated that the reception area signage and greeting of customers helps to speed identification of POS-eligible veterans and spouses. Other signs provide information about transitioning and Helmets to Hardhats, brochures with titles such as "AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] and the Armed Services," "Veterans Passport to New Opportunities," and "An Ohio Veterans' Guide to Benefits and Services" are available, and copies of GI Jobs magazine are on hand. A room called the Veterans Business Resource Center is clearly marked and can be used for meetings between veterans and employers, one-on-one assistance, training and testing, or when a veteran would prefer a quiet environment. A back wall contains a library with numerous books on job search, cover letter and resume writing, military-related careers, and job hunting for ex-offenders.

2. POS Procedures

When customers visit the AJC, staff at the front desk greet them, ask them to sign in (either via the kiosk if they are returning or through an information form if they are new), and ask each customer if he or she is a veteran. The information sheet asks if the customer is a veteran or the spouse of a veteran (but does not define an eligible spouse). Veterans are informed of their right to POS, both by signage and by the worker. POS is described to veterans and eligible spouses as having first access to job postings and priority placement in workshops and trainings if a civilian and a veteran otherwise meet all the same criteria for those services. Often, spouses of veterans and active-duty service members will volunteer this information, which can lead to identification of POS-eligible spouses. Eligible spouses are rarely identified, likely because the definition is very restrictive, but one was identified recently in the resource room. She qualified for and was entered into intensive case management. The greeter determines if the customer is registered in Ohio Means Jobs. If not, the first three screens of SCOTI, the computer system that tracks core services, are completed using data from the information form. It is the goal that every customer sits down with a staff member for about 20 minutes to complete an assessment and determine his or her needs.

Veterans complete an additional form to determine if the veteran has barriers that require referral to a DVOP specialist, what benefits are currently being received, and for details of his or her service and separation that will affect eligibility for various programs. The back of the sheet has a list of services the veteran can indicate interest in receiving. If no major barriers are found, the veteran is not referred to a DVOP specialist but does continue to get POS. If the veteran has barriers that suggest he or she would be best served by working with a DVOP specialist, or if the veteran requests to work with a DVOP specialist, one will meet with the veteran at that time or contact him or her in three to five days, depending on availability. Most veterans eventually see a veterans' representative.

Staff stressed that they provide POS to veterans before receipt of the DD-214 but that ultimately many programs will require documentation to confirm veterans' status and program eligibility. Staff verify a veteran's eligibility before awarding grants or enrolling him or her in a program for which funding is allocated. For intensive case management services, the DD-214 is

needed to identify the nature of the discharge and to confirm that veterans served at least 180 days. When staff refer veterans and eligible spouses to partner programs, they advise them that the partner program has its own eligibility requirements and might need to see the DD-214 to independently determine eligibility. Documentation is also needed for eligible spouses. When documentation is provided, it is saved in SCOTI and a copy is placed in the individual's folder. Assistance in getting a copy of the DD-214 is available if needed. Staff noted that the POS flyers in the reception area helped eligible spouses self-identify.

The availability of WIA funds varies throughout the fiscal year and available funds limit the number of people who can participate. A waiting list develops and veterans rise to the top of the list due to POS. Every spring, staff determine how much funding is necessary for renewals of enrollments for individuals who will continue their training. The remaining money can then be allocated to new participants. New participants are also taken in throughout the year as funding becomes available. Near the end of the fiscal year, about 80 percent of those pulled from the waiting list are veterans, though in other times of the year when funding is not as tight, the share of veterans is lower. WIA staff and veterans' representatives work closely together on shared customers. On-site training, resume development, computer skills workshops, and other skills development classes are available on site, even if funded training is not currently available.

Job listings are put on a 24-hour hold for veterans. During this time, only veterans can see and apply for the new listings and employers see only listings for veterans who match this posting. Veterans' representatives also call or email veterans they are aware of who would be a good match for particular job postings that arrive. Veterans have priority for other services, such as seminars and workshops, but there has been sufficient capacity in these services for all AJC customers.

3. Self-Service Materials and Systems

The resource room offers a variety of self-service resources, such as public-access computers, copy and fax machines, and scanners. Customers can use the public-access computers for job search, resume creation, skills assessment and improvement, and other job search and training activities on the Ohio Means Jobs website and elsewhere. KeyTrain, which ties in with the WorkKeys certifications, typing tutorials, and Microsoft Office tutorials are also available on the hard drives of the machines. The Source does not give the WorkKeys tests, but they are available through some area schools. Staff are available in the resource room to assist customers. Additional computers are available for use by veterans. These computers are located in a separate, lightly trafficked area near the staff cubicles at the back of the resource room.

Ohio Means Jobs, which is the customer side of the SCOTI system, can be accessed from anywhere. Individuals can register through it independently, conduct job search, identify as a veteran or eligible spouse, and get access to jobs on veteran hold.

4. Customer Service and Reporting Systems

As mentioned, SCOTI is Ohio's comprehensive, statewide data collection, case management, and reporting system for workforce services. The public face of the system is the Ohio Means Jobs website. Both customers and staff can enter data into the system and complete modules appropriate to their roles. Internally, case managers from different agencies are able to

access the same customer data, aiding in cross-programmatic service delivery and seamless services. Reporting of required data to the state is done through the SCOTI system.

Customers create an account in Ohio Means Jobs and, because it is a statewide portal, this account can be accessed via the Internet and by any AJC in the state. The account registration feature asks about active-duty status, if the person served for more than 180 days, discharge date, the nature of the discharge (honorable, dishonorable, and other). If the customer is a disabled veteran, the system asks for the disability rating. Questions to identify eligible spouses are also asked. Additional information that a veteran might provide to a staff member can be recorded in the case notes. Until veterans present their DD-214 to document their status, the information entered in Ohio Means Jobs is assumed to be accurate for POS purposes but is marked as unverified. With respect to UI, basic information on recipients is automatically entered in SCOTI; their job search activities must be documented in SCOTI as a condition of benefit receipt.

Employers post job openings on Ohio Means Jobs and can conduct resume searches through the pool of registered customers. Employers specifically seeking veterans can conduct those targeted searches to the extent that customers have self-identified as veterans when they registered on Ohio Means Jobs. In employer searches, veterans are identified by an icon and appear at the top of the search results. Customer contact information is kept private; employers contact job seekers through a generic email address. Ohio Means Jobs is linked to Monster.com; thus, postings from several job boards are pulled in and resumes are visible on Monster.com. Some activity is required every 60 days or a customer's account becomes inactive under Monster.com rules.

When a job order is opened on Ohio Means Jobs, it is accessible only to veterans for the first 24 hours. Because of when the system updates and when messages are sent, veterans effectively have a 48-hour advance notice. The system automatically conducts job matching based on position title, experience, and education. The job titles used for matching are those listed in O*Net. Staff also conduct resume searches to look for veterans who have skills and qualifications matching job postings; staff contact the veteran to alert him or her of the opening and encourage the veteran to apply for the job.

The sections and tasks in SCOTI available to each staff member are specific to their roles. Staff enter all services provided to customers in SCOTI to fulfill reporting requirements and ensure that individual customers are effectively served regardless of where they register and which AJCs and partners they visit. All services received by a customer—including resume research and job search—are visible to staff at any AJC. Job referrals made by the system are automatically tracked. Partners to whom customers are referred can make entries in case notes, which can then be viewed by other staff to monitor what has been done, that all necessary services are being provided, and what progress the customer is making.

The activities reported in SCOTI are much more detailed than what is required for reporting to the state and must be altered to fit the state requirements. For example, SCOTI records an individual's attendance at any combination of resume, interviewing, and career exploration workshops, but the state system requires a simple yes or no as to whether the individual attended any kind of workshop. This requires recording the more detailed data before submission for state record keeping. A second database records visits to the AJC for universal core services. The data are gathered when individuals sign in using the touch-screen kiosk. This database does not

connect with the SCOTI database, so reports on, for example, the number of people who came in to do self-directed job search must be tabulated separately. When customers enrolled in a program participate in universal core services, these services have to be manually entered in SCOTI.

The AJC operator uses data organized by race, sex, age, veteran status, disability status, ex-offender status, and dislocated worker status to determine how the AJC is doing in comparison with the goals of its grants. The AJC operator also monitors utilization of building space and resources and customer satisfaction. Such data reviews showed a need for additional basic skills training and general equivalency diploma (GED) testing, which was put in place gradually and has grown with demand.

5. Monitoring POS

State staff monitor the ETA 9002 and VETS 200 reports while regional staff review these and additional reports created by the regional veterans' program managers. AJC managers and veterans' program managers also monitor reports. All observe the number of veterans served, the types of services they received, the number entered into case management, and the share that entered training and employment. When a customer who was registered in SCOTI finds employment or exits the AJC system for other reasons and a staff member closes out his or her case, the system generates entered employment, retention, and average earnings for three quarters using wage data reported by employers. Regulations and policies are kept current to ensure continued compliance and staff are observed to determine how procedures are implemented.

Supervisors can generate reports from SCOTI and from the universal core services database. These reports contain the necessary information for required reporting, but do not fulfill the supervisory needs of some managers. Although considerable detail on who provides certain services is entered into the system, less detail can be pulled out. For this reason, the veterans' program manager requests supplemental biweekly reports from his staff on details that they track on a separate spreadsheet. These reports are used to analyze trends and areas of improvement, identify areas in which training is necessary, detect activities that work very well for veterans who have found employment and that should be emulated, detect a fall-off in placements early enough that the cause can be found and corrected if possible, and find patterns that indicate that particular firms are hiring or that certain occupations are in demand. This information can then be included in the biweekly report to the director, used to target services, or to reinforce staff training on POS.

C. Translation of Military Experience and Skills

The veterans' representatives and Wagner-Peyser staff we interviewed are confident in their skills in translating military experience to civilian terminology and they collaborate with one another during the translation process. O*NET is the primary tool used, though other public websites are as well. Veterans' representative staff have deep knowledge and experience, which they use to translate military skills and experience when developing veterans' resumes. Two staff members in the resource room are also well versed in this and tend to focus on helping veterans in this way. All staff know where to look for assistance and staff interact well and are willing to help others or ask for help.

D. Challenges in Implementing POS

Implementation of POS does not appear to be a challenge in Toledo. Veterans are regularly served in the resource room and by ES and WIA staff. They are referred to veterans' representative staff only when they have barriers that require it or when they request to see such staff. The AJC makes an effort to identify veterans and eligible spouses when they first enter the site by posting signs advertising POS and encouraging self-identification and by asking all entering customers about their status. The state has tried to mitigate POS implementation challenges by including POS definitions and examples of how POS should be implemented in its published policy and procedures.

One challenge cited in Toledo was that when limited training funds result even in veterans being on a waiting list, some POS–eligible veterans feel they are not receiving priority because they have to wait. Staff try to make clear that the funding is not through an entitlement program, but the veterans do not always understand this. Customers who want to begin school or training immediately even though funding is not available are encouraged to find out if any of the less expensive or free providers, such as Owens Community College or the AMVETS online courses, can meet their needs. Staff also encourage customers to apply for military educational benefits, Pell grants, and other funding sources.

Another challenge cited was that DVOP specialists' contacts with businesses and potential employers have to be tied to finding a position for a particular customer. Some staff would like DVOP specialists, like LVER staff, to build business relationships more generally so the relationships are already strong and well developed when a suitable candidate comes along.

Occasionally, a customer will hold the belief that the purpose of the AJC is to provide customers with jobs and the POS means a veteran is the first to be given a job. Staff indicated that this view is not widely held and can generally be corrected, but sometimes a customer will continue to hold the misperception. In an example given of such a case, the AJC responded to the various civil rights, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and political steps taken by the customer and continued to provide referrals to training and other services that could be of assistance to the customer.

E. Promising Practices in POS Implementation

Promising practices identified in Ohio and discussed throughout this report include the following:

- Promising practices to improve POS procedures:
  - Use of the NVTI DVOP locator to connect relocating customers with a DVOP specialist in the area to which they are moving before the move
  - Color coding of client folders to facilitate easy identification and service provision by customer type
  - Frequent reinforcement of POS guidance with staff
  - Highly engaged and well-informed state veterans' program representative
  - Monthly staffing meetings that include all staff and partners

  - Monthly in-house staff training
  - Use of "e-manuals" and online forms center to disseminate POS information
  - Involvement of both DVOP specialists and LVER staff in various parts of the process of serving each veteran
  - Developing relationship with AMVETS
  - 24 hour job hold for veterans
- Promising practices to improve veterans' awareness of POS:
  - Signage in reception area
  - Outreach to VSOs, the VA clinic and homeless program, churches, and other community organizations
  - Notices in veteran-oriented customer materials

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Further Guidance and Dissemination of Guidance

Staff stated that listing the various legislation and other documents to which the guidance refers in the text makes it intimidating and discourages staff from reading guidance. Instead, they thought those specifics could be in footnotes or a section at the end and that the body of the document could be written in more common language, with special terms defined within the document to make it more understandable. They also suggested that clear instruction on how to implement the guidance, such as "Ask this series of questions to determine if an individual is an eligible spouse …" would be helpful. In many ways, what they requested was similar to TEN 15-10, so DOL should consider more proactive steps to increase awareness of this document among AJCs because staff did not seem to be familiar with TEN 15-10.

B. Outreach and Veterans' Services

A frequent recommendation was to advertise the services of the AJCs and the existence of POS more heavily and broadly. Staff report that many veterans do not know about POS and that the population in general does not know about the role of the AJCs. Staff feel that they are only scratching the surface of what they could be doing to help, particularly with recently separated veterans who are looking for a civilian job for the first time. Several staff members cited recent advertising of the VA hospitals and the services they have available, particularly in the areas of mental health and suicide prevention, as being a good model. Just as a member of the public might see the VA's campaign and mention to a veteran friend or family member that the VA might be a good resource, so too with the AJCs. This campaign would also help employers looking to hire recently separated veterans, but who do not know where to find them, become familiar with the AJCs.

Staff suggested the campaign utilize various communication modes, such as print, radio, television, and social media. Social media, Facebook specifically, was mentioned as a way of getting out the word about services available to the general public and to veterans at low cost and effort. Younger veterans especially are likely to be on Facebook and the linking aspect would enable reaching not only that one veteran, but also friends who could be in the same situation. Staff feel that the advertising should be done on a high level, either national or state, so that a consistent and correct message is sent and the campaign is of a high level of quality. Local-level messaging, which might be inaccurate or come across as unprofessional, is viewed as potentially detrimental.

One step that staff interviewed see as necessary to increase public knowledge and minimize confusion is to develop a common brand. No matter where someone goes in the state, or perhaps the country, the public will then know where to look to find help in job search and training. When the name varies by county or region—currently in Ohio there are The Source, The Job Store, Career Connections, and Job Solutions, for example—people do not know what to look for or if such services exist there, if they were aware of them at all. Local control is nice in that it allows areas to tailor their activities to local conditions, such as the Toledo area demand list requiring that a job pay a living wage, but to some extent, uniformity is also desirable.

Some staff worry that with the growing number of organizations available to assist veterans, veterans may become confused about what each organization is and what services are available. Veterans might go to a private organization that advertises assistance in finding a job thinking that it is an AJC, not receive the full complement of services and funding possibilities available at the AJC, and not know to look further. Of particular concern is the notion that the VA might create an employment service program for veterans that replicates what the veterans' program at the AJC provides. Staff believe it would be better to utilize and augment, if necessary, what is in place rather than duplicating effort by creating a parallel system.

APPENDIX J

STUDY SITE PROFILE: NORFOLK, VIRGINIA

I. DESCRIPTION OF STUDY SITE

A. Population and Local Area Description

Virginia is the 12th-largest of the 50 states by population, with about 6,450,000 inhabitants. Of the total population, 6,244,000 people, or 77.1 percent, are ages 18 or older. The median age is 37.6 years. About 735,000 people, or 12.0 percent of the adult population, are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. By race, 69.4 percent of Virginians are white, 19.5 percent are black, 5.6 percent are Asian, and the rest are of other races. Hispanics, who can be of any race, make up 8.0 percent of the population of Virginia. Of those ages 25 and older, 14.6 percent have earned a graduate or professional degree, 20.5 percent have a bachelor's degree, 7.0 percent have an associate's degree, and 25.6 percent graduated from high school or have an equivalency certificate or degree.[26]

As of April 2012, the unemployment rate in Virginia was 5.6 percent, significantly lower than the national unemployment rate of 8.1 percent.[27] In the first five years of the past decade, unemployment in Virginia decreased gradually from about 4.0 percent at the beginning of 2002 to a low of 2.9 percent in early 2007. It then began a sharp increase, peaking at 7.3 percent in January 2010. Since that time, is has gradually decreased.[28]

Norfolk, part of the Hampton Roads metropolitan area in the southeastern corner of the state, is located at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay and is bordered on the west by the Elizabeth River. The city and its ports and protected deep-water channels are a major shipping hub, with the ports being the second largest on the east coast by cargo volume, after the port of New York and New Jersey. Shipping is the area's second largest industry after the military.

Hampton Roads is a major military center, lead by the world's largest naval station, Naval Station Norfolk. The installation is the current headquarters of the U.S. Fleet Forces Command, Allied Command Transformation (NATO), and the U.S. Joint Forces Command. It is also the home port for the Second Fleet, which comprises 62,000 active duty personnel, 75 ships, and 134 aircraft. The naval station has 14 piers and 11 aircraft hangers and is the hub for Navy logistics going to the European and Central Command theaters of operation and to the Caribbean. Other major installations in close proximity include Joint Base Langley–Eustis, Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek–Fort Story, Naval Air Station Oceana, Naval Medical Station Portsmouth, and Coast Guard Sector Hampton Roads.

Managers at the Opportunity Inc. One-Stop Workforce Center in Norfolk, a focus of this study, indicated that this America Job Center (AJC) served approximately 1,000 customers in February 2012; the customer count typically ranges from 600 to 1,000 per month. Customer counts fluctuate based on local economic events and available training funds. For example, AJC

[26] Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, Tables DP02, DP03, and DP05.

[27] Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Regional and State Employment and Unemployment, April 2012–May 18, 2012.

[28] Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, seasonally adjusted monthly data.

management reported that at the time of the site visit in May 2012, there had been numerous notices of closures. Enlisted Retention Boards (ERBs) and the Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) closure have been major events in the local economy and impact the flow of veterans to the Norfolk AJC. Approximately 80 percent of the veterans served in the AJC are Navy veterans (as estimated by one of the veterans' representatives).

B. Local Workforce System

1. Organization

The Virginia Workforce Council (VWC) and the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) oversee state workforce services. The VWC is comprised of 15 active Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) in Virginia; the Norfolk AJC is part of the Hampton Roads WIB, also located in Norfolk. The Council provides leadership to the state on efforts to develop a workforce aligned with employer needs. The Council is charged with serving as the state board for WIA and setting policy and standards for the local WIBs and AJCs. The VEC is the public employment service established to assist in helping suitable employers and employees find each other. It is a partner in the Virginia Employer Network (VEN.)

The Norfolk AJC has one central location, three satellite offices, and as of the time of the site visit, 33 SHARE Network Access Point (SNAP) sites. The satellite locations are at the Regional Workforce Development Center at Paul Buchanan Community College in Franklin, the City of Suffolk Workforce Development Center, and the JFCOM Transition Center, also in Suffolk. The AJC participates in the JFCOM center by providing staff five days per week in a partnership with the city of Suffolk, and state and federal agencies. The SNAP sites are faith based or community organizations where individuals may engage in self-directed job search, connect with the AJC via computer, or receive basic assistance from a trained individual. The individuals trained to assist at these sites are to publicize job search services in their communities and refer visitors to the AJC. Managers at the central AJC oversee career developers at the satellite locations and the SNAPs.

The WIB monitors AJC budgets, training providers, and veterans' priority of service (POS). The WIB also writes policies and procedures, and vendor RFPs and agreements. Within the AJC, the center director reports to the WIB operations manager, and two managers report to the center director—one oversees career developers and the other oversees business services, resource room coordination, and other staff. Guidelines and procedures in the satellite centers are generally consistent with the central AJC, although as smaller entities they may serve customers more quickly.

AJC management described the relationship across the satellite and central offices as "like family," with a very team-oriented approach. There is frequent formal and informal communication and reporting between the satellite and central offices. Core and intensive customer levels at the satellite offices are monitored to determine whether staff need temporary reassignment to help with increased customer loads at any one office. For example, the JFCOM site is a temporary center that was set up when JFCOM was decommissioned; when a large influx of veterans came into the JFCOM center, two additional career developers were hired. In the past, the AJC has also set up temporary centers at companies undergoing closings, such as International Paper.

The Norfolk AJC has multiple partner organizations, including the VEC, which provides all veterans' representatives in the AJC; the Department of Rehabilitative Services; and the Department of Corrections. On-site partners include the disability navigator and migrant farm workers programs, and the Virginia Beach Adult Education Center. Community colleges and Norfolk public schools are on-site part time, the latter teaching GED classes, and referrals are made to AARP. The AJC has an MOU with the Department of Social Services Responsible Fatherhood Program to help program participants find employment. It also has a longstanding relationship with the Fleet and Family Support Program.

AJC management meets regularly with its partners and with potential new partners. A veterans' representative reported giving a presentation on POS at one of these meetings, which led to a request from the Department of Corrections to speak to felons about to be released. AJC management reported that its partner organizations are also implementing POS.

2. Serving Veterans

The Norfolk AJC has a strong commitment to serving veterans, transitioning service members, and military families, and respondents reported that veterans' services were a focus before POS guidance was disseminated. Most managers and staff have a military background that makes their commitment personal as well as professional. AJC staff, including veterans' representatives, serve veterans and notify them about POS at multiple points during and following the registration process. For example, veterans' representatives at the AJC's orientation routinely ask participants whether they are veterans. AJC staff direct all veterans who have already completed orientation to meet with veterans' representatives. During those meetings, the veterans' representatives conduct assessments, assist with resume writing, manage cases, and motivate veterans for training and job search.

The representatives build training and employment collaborations, and one veterans' representative also serves as the state's green jobs coordinator for veterans. Veterans have used a short-term training grant to obtain certification in renewable energy-related positions, such as in building maintenance, and to take the Building Performance Institute Exam, HVAC, and LEED exams. Similarly, the Norfolk AJC offers joint programs with Tidewater Community College (TCC) to provide alternative certification training that allows veterans and other customers to move quickly to civilian employment. Through an H1B health care grant that gives priority to veterans and their eligible spouses, the Norfolk AJC has facilitated the training of approximately 220 individuals for health care positions other than entry level. Five target groups, which include minority populations, veterans, military spouses, and those affected by the JFCOM closing, all receive equal priority for this grant valued at $10,000 per recipient. The WIB also recently developed a handbook for employers on how to hire veterans and why veterans are good employees.

The VEC veterans' representatives work at the AJC on a rotating basis, and a different representative is at the AJC each workday. Veterans' representatives are also assigned to the Franklin and Suffolk satellite offices, and there is consistency in who is assigned to those locations. AJC staff attributed the difference in rotating versus consistent assignments to the fact that the VEC is located close to the Norfolk AJC, whereas the VEC is collocated with the Franklin and Suffolk satellite offices. AJC staff reported that the rotating arrangement works well, in that a veterans' representative is always available, although some representatives are more informative than others. The representatives are able to provide customers with a deeper

level of information on, and access to, veterans' services than can AJC staff. Because of the mix of services a veteran may receive, he or she may see both a career developer and a veterans' representative.

We conducted a focus group with veterans during our site visit; not every focus group participant was aware of, or had worked with, the veterans' representatives at the AJC and at least one had worked with the veterans' representatives at the VEC rather than at the AJC. Focus group participants indicated that veterans prefer to come to the AJC for services rather than the VEC, because it is less congested and can thus provide services more quickly. Many of the veterans who go to the VEC first are there to apply for unemployment compensation, although the VEC also provides a resource room, workshops, resume writing, training, and veterans' representatives.

3. Processes

The AJC sees its major function as training workers with the skills needed to succeed in the local economy; for customers who already have these skills, the AJC focuses on helping them obtain the necessary certifications and providing guidance on how to best present themselves to employers. AJC staff work with customers to identify training opportunities that mesh well with local needs. AJC management reported that a high percentage of customers are not educated above high school and are not highly skilled; many speak English as a second language. Local employers more typically look for higher skilled technical workers. Navy veterans tend to be highly skilled and can be a good match for local employers, in some cases with skills retraining through the AJC. AJC managers noted that veterans tend to have better work experience and are perceived as more reliable than nonveterans. However, both groups are sometimes disappointed to learn that they need training or retraining before obtaining employment. Both groups also face disappointment associated with scaling back expectations for their job search after leaving a higher paying, lower skilled position.

AJC management described their major responsibilities related to POS as ensuring consistent staff knowledge and implementation of POS and outreach to veterans. Veterans participating in the focus group reported that the AJC staff demonstrate "a passion" and "altruistic spirit" in their service to veterans that makes it better than other environments. One participant suggested that the VA "needs to catch up" to the AJC. The veterans also appreciated the smaller, concentrated scale of this AJC.

Most veterans' representatives and AJC staff interviewed reported improvements in the implementation of POS over the past three or four years. They noted that the approach to veterans is more focused on ensuring that they feel welcome and appreciated; staff attributed this shift to more veterans staying in the Norfolk area after separation and coming to the AJC for training and employment services. Staff also noted that there are many more programs and job leads targeting veterans. The JFCOM closure and ERBs have heightened staff focus on veterans' issues. Staff discussed veterans services beyond those in the AJC including housing, emergency shelters, and food banks.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A. Awareness and Usefulness of Federal Guidance

AJC managers and staff are familiar with POS guidance because there is a state policy and a local policy; the local policy was written by the WIB. Because these policies are derived from the federal guidance, not all staff are familiar with the federal guidance itself. However, some managers and staff indicated that the federal guidance was clear and useful in conversations with veterans to demonstrate when POS is applicable. One manager described the local POS policy as particularly well written because it provides definitions, and then clearly describes different scenarios and orders of priority. For example, the MIS technician uses the POS policy to prioritize registration of customers for training; customer folders indicating that the customer receives veterans' POS are entered into the system first.

One veterans' representative was only somewhat familiar with the federal policy, indicating that the 180-day definition of in-service was used for POS. However, this response was not common across AJC staff. AJC staff indicated that other program operators generally seemed familiar with POS requirements.

The local policy is distributed to all AJC staff. Some staff indicated that policies are posted in their offices and used every day given the volume of veterans in the AJC. They indicated that AJC management strongly emphasizes the importance of veterans' POS and instructs staff with any questions about POS to ask their supervisor or a member of the management team for guidance. Veterans' POS is discussed at weekly and monthly staff meetings as needed; for example, the AJC conducted a refresher training on veterans' POS at a staff meeting that included discussion about determining which customer scenarios would be considered POS. Staff indicated that AJC management makes sure they are well trained, and periodically checks in with individual staff to ensure that they are properly implementing POS. The prevalence of veterans among managers and staff was viewed as a facilitator toward consistent understanding of POS across staff. Veterans' representatives participate in regular communication, meetings, and webinars that reinforce the guidance both from a broad perspective and allow them to obtain responses to specific questions. One veterans' representative developed a PowerPoint presentation to educate workforce staff and partners about veterans' POS.

AJC staff are knowledgeable about the POS eligibility requirement that veterans have a discharge that is not dishonorable, as well as the conditions necessary for spousal eligibility. Management indicated that a DD-214 is required to verify type of discharge. AJC managers and staff indicated that issues arise in interpreting the guidance and eligibility when individuals fail to register for selective service, or when it is difficult to determine whether a military spouse should be queried about potential eligibility for POS. In such cases, staff refer to the available documentation and seek additional information and help from colleagues.

B. Implementation of POS

1. Veterans' Awareness of POS

Veterans' lack of awareness regarding POS is a strong concern of the AJC. Veterans tend to lack knowledge about POS before coming to the AJC, unless they have learned about it from

veterans' representatives at the VEC. However, the AJC employs procedures during the intake and registration process to advise veterans of POS and for them to identify themselves as POS-eligible. The initial sign-in sheet asks each customer to identify whether he or she is a veteran. If managers and staff see that only one or two veterans have signed up in POS-reserved spots for workshops, they will ask in the AJC reception area whether any veterans are present and invite them to join the workshop. Such customers are told that they do not need to be on standby for workshops; they will immediately receive POS for participation in those workshops. A binder of information about veterans' POS is available to all customers. On rare occasions, a veteran will think he or she is eligible for POS but is not; generally, those individuals have been dishonorably discharged. In those situations, the AJC provides all services for which the veteran is eligible, and determines whether the veteran is eligible for POS in any other category. Focus group participants identified a range of sources that provided information about POS. One learned about it at the AJC and indicated that staff were clear and direct in stating that if you are a veteran, you receive POS. Others learned about POS at an AJC booth at a job fair, at the JFCOM transition center, at a UI office, through word of mouth, or through their own research.

It is more difficult for eligible spouses to become aware of their POS eligibility. The AJC application asks whether the individual is a military spouse, but staff are uncertain whether the spouse of someone who is MIA or a military widow would respond "yes" to that question. And, for a customer who does check military spouse on the application, eligibility for POS can be a sensitive topic.

a. Outreach and Referrals

The AJC conducts ongoing outreach and responds to local economic events through targeted outreach and rapid response services to match laid-off workers with new jobs requiring similar skills. When the AJC received stimulus funding in previous years, there was a large influx of customers and four additional career developers were hired.

Staff reported that it is easier to get nonveterans to use AJC services than veterans, because veterans lack awareness of the AJC. AJC managers and staff are not clear why this is the case, given the extent of outreach they conduct through TAP and the Fleet and Family Support Program (FFSP). One veterans' representative reported spending about 10 to 15 percent of his time on outreach, including outreach to Veteran Service Organizations that tend to attract older veterans. Staff make a concerted effort to conduct outreach to a diverse group or organizations as early in the transition process as possible. They distribute cards, flyers, brochures, and notepads identifying the AJC website and routinely email calendars of activities to all of their contacts. AJC managers and staff indicated that a military AJC could consolidate services and communications to simplify the current diffuse processes, which are difficult for veterans to navigate. Many workforce service providers have similar sounding names yet provide different services. Marketing of some veterans' initiatives, such as the veterans' gold card, can be very limited: the AJC reported that perhaps one veteran has presented a gold card since that initiative began. In addition, a veterans' representative reported that it had been difficult to find information about the gold card initiative; the representative described it as "a good idea, just poorly executed."

A veterans' representative indicated that veterans sometimes think that the representatives are from Veterans Affairs because the state and agency acronyms are the same, so there is occasionally confusion about the services provided.

The AJC's business services unit includes information about the veterans' tax credit in its employer outreach portfolio to increase awareness about the benefits of hiring veterans. In addition to TAP and FFSP, AJC staff in the central and satellite offices conduct outreach to veterans by participating in military job fairs, which attract a wider age range of veterans, and working with the Wounded Warriors program, the VA hospital, the Financial Stability Coalition, the Financial Education Roundtable, the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and other organizations. Staff also conduct outreach to companies facing mass layoffs, churches, prisons, and city departments. Some of these organizations serve all customers and some are veteran-focused. Staff make presentations to describe AJC services and veteran POS, and exchange information. AJC staff spoke at a recent event at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard for 200 individuals leaving the military due to ERB. At the time of our AJC site visit, staff planned to speak at upcoming ERB job fairs and military-spouse job fairs. However, veteran participants in the focus group expressed some dissatisfaction with the job fairs, indicating that these fairs appear to be used by employers to win government contracts. The employers gather veteran resumes for bids but then do not hire those veterans. For the satellite area, the job fairs tend to showcase warehouses for national distributors that often like to hire veterans. The satellite offices conduct outreach with these employers to identify their needs and describe the services provided by the satellites, so that they can eliminate gaps in the process of preparing veterans for these jobs.

Nonveterans hear about the AJC through the VEC, Department of Social Services, the SNAP sites, and training providers. The SNAP sites are "the tip of the spear" of outreach because they are well-signed sites throughout the community. Many military spouses come through traditionally nonveteran routes. The AJC plans to expand its provision of materials to SNAP sites. The AJCs currently conduct resume and interview workshops at the SNAP sites.

AJC staff described the information challenge on POS as a paradox. Perhaps not enough information is being provided, but also the military community may not pay enough attention. One staff member indicated that if it were possible to obtain a monthly list of individuals being discharged, the AJC could provide better outreach and information on POS. Staff also thought that public service announcements about POS, or Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social media site engagement might be effective outreach mechanisms to explore.

b. TAP

AJC staff presentations at TAP and the Fleet and Family Support Center are the main vehicles for outreach on veterans' services and POS, with TAP comprising the larger audience. They advise veterans and transitioning service members of the services available and encourage them to visit the AJC. Veterans' representatives indicated that when they facilitate TAP classes there are approximately 85 to 125 individuals and generally three types of transitioning service members: (1) senior enlisted and officers who are about to retire, (2) experienced enlisted to junior officers, and (3) young enlisted including those leaving after an ERB. Veterans' representatives described the motivations of these three types and the extent to which they are interested in workforce services and POS as being very different. For example, the more senior participants in TAP (O5-O6s) view POS as a program for those who cannot succeed on their own merits. The middle group is apprehensive and focuses on how they are going to transition to civilian life and pay their bills. The youngest group (E3s and below) is less worried about the future; they generally perceive themselves as having more options or are planning to use the post-9/11 Montgomery GI Bill.

Because the military lifestyle guarantees a job, a steady paycheck, and other benefits, transition can be jarring. Veterans' representatives indicated that some individuals, especially for the younger and midgrade group, find themselves in TAP due to their own actions or inactivity: they may have scored poorly on an advancement exam; failed to maintain physical fitness; or failed to follow rules regarding drug use or supervisor respect. Understanding this context, the veterans' representatives try to facilitate the transition during TAP by explaining how they can start the registration process in Virginia's Workforce Connection, and that the more information they provide upfront the more job notifications they will receive.

A new online TAP was under consideration for implementation during summer 2012. Individuals would complete a preliminary screening when signing up for TAP in which they would indicate how far along they were in the workforce transition process—for example, whether they had completed a resume and whether they had scheduled any job interviews. Such information would help facilitators understand the level of guidance each individual needs for his or her workforce transition process.

c. Media and Signage

The AJC is located on the second floor of an office building on the edge of a shopping center in a sprawling commercial district. There is no external signage on the building identifying the AJC. In this vein, staff interviewed and veterans in the focus group discussed the general difficulty of finding information about the AJC and veterans' POS and the need for more marketing. Staff interviewed were unaware of any statewide information dissemination plan regarding veterans' services or POS and indicated that at a local level it is very confusing for veterans to process information about service providers and services. Overlapping services offered by the VEC and the AJC, especially for dislocated workers, can cause confusion among employers and customers. The AJC has asked for state guidance on how the overlapping agencies can present a more unified front to employers. Veterans' representatives indicated some frustration with the lack of advertising and marketing support from DOL and VA for some veteran-oriented grant programs such as green jobs; staff assume the burden for marketing these programs. The gold-card initiative included a statewide webinar to train LWIAs, WIBs, and AJCs, and veterans' representatives disseminate information on these initiatives within the AJC. The AJC's website offers a specific page describing all services available to veterans. The AJC provides customers who do not reside locally with an information sheet on how to find workforce services in their area.

The physical environment of the AJC is professional and welcoming. There is no signage at the entry way to engage or alert veterans and eligible spouses to identify themselves as such when signing in, or to advise them they may be eligible for POS.

2. POS Procedures

The AJC has a well-defined customer flow, and at several points, managers and staff check on veteran and eligible spouse status. Each customer enters the AJC reception area and signs a sheet, marking whether he or she is a veteran. Customers sign up for orientation and workshops, both of which offer five priority spots for veterans. There are also standby lists in case the sessions are full. The windowed waiting area is warm and inviting, with tables and information kiosks. Customers can review information about job search, training, resume writing, networking, interviewing, and other workforce services while waiting for orientation, workshops,

or staff assistance. AJC management reported that they are working on changing their greeting in the reception area, as well as on the phone, to better identify veterans initially. The AJC at the time of the site visit was also planning to add a designated telephone line for veterans' questions; staff would check this line daily. The AJC previously used this model for specific closures, and found it worked well.

Focus group participants reported that they were not always asked at reception about their veteran status, but that they could check their veteran status on the sign in sheet and have priority sign up for workshops. These veteran participants expressed some annoyance about the extent of redundant paperwork in applying for services.

AJC management reported that efforts are made to prevent bottlenecks in the reception area by copying identification cards and bringing customers directly into orientations and workshops. Veterans are called in first from the reserved lists, and then first from the standby lists. After the initial orientation, customers use computers in the self-service area to register in Virginia Workforce Connection by completing a personal profile and registering for selective service if they need to and have not. Orientation facilitators try to make sure that all questions have been completed, including branch of service and discharge. Customers then attend one or two of the three available workshops before coming into group eligibility for training and intensive services. The program honors classes taken through TAP, including resume writing, job search, interviewing skills, and workshops offered by the VEC.

Customers must receive an orientation before participating in workshops at the AJC. WIA and POS general procedures are discussed and veterans and eligible spouses are asked to identify themselves by show of hands and as part of the demographic information on the two-page application for services, explaining that the purpose is so that POS can be provided. After the initial sign-in sheet, this is the second opportunity for veterans and eligible spouses to identify themselves. This application is entered into Virtual One Stop (VOS). Staff will also conduct individual orientations for customers uncomfortable in a group setting. Five priority spots are set aside for the workshops: veterans are called into the workshops first, then spouses, and finally all other customers.

The workshops include a group certification run by the career developers that identifies individuals eligible for intensive services. During the group session, veterans are asked to self-certify that they are veterans; this self-certification is a precursor to bringing in a DD-214. If the veteran does not have a DD-214, they work with the veterans' representatives to obtain one. When the DD-214 or other documentation is received, staff verify that eligibility criteria for POS are met.

AJC management reviews the paper application files for intensive services to determine whether they are from veterans or spouses and to confirm they have met WIA requirements, the DD-214 is present, the discharge type is not dishonorable, and that the spouse is eligible (if applicable.) The online information is largely assessments and other information entered by the applicant and the career developer, but management requires the paper file with the DD-214 to confirm POS eligibility. The POS-eligible applicant files are then prioritized for entry to intensive services; the MIS technician data enters them before all other applicants for intensive services. Although POS eligible veterans and spouses are enrolled sooner into intensive services, they generally receive the same one-on-one assistance from AJC staff as other customers, with some tailoring. AJC staff try to complete the initial series of orientation, workshops, registration,

assessments, and documentation with the career developer within one to two weeks. Every step in that process is documented.

Managers indicated that at the time of the site visit most qualified customers had been able to receive services, so POS had not been much of a consideration but that it becomes a consideration when overall funding is tighter. Veterans and spouses may not meet POS criteria but still meet WIA eligibility requirements, so they receive services from the AJC. One respondent indicated that in the past about ten percent of nonveteran customers indicated they were veterans to try to get veteran-targeted services, although this practice is now less frequent.

After certification for intensive services, customers are randomly assigned a career developer with whom they will meet on a regular basis. AJC customers, whether veteran or nonveteran, may request specific staff. However, veterans' representatives and AJC staff do not see a preference of veterans for specific staff, beyond requesting staff they have previously seen. The career developer checks the application materials to ensure that all information needed for POS is completed. The customer and career developer review completed assessments and discuss the best ways to achieve short- and long-term goals. All veterans are typically referred to a veterans' representative at some point, either through their career developer or when they come to the AJC after orientation and workshops have been completed; they are typically referred directly to the veterans' representative working at the AJC that day. The veteran will work with both.

Career developers are assigned 10 new customers at a time, but total workloads fluctuate. One career developer reported trying to maintain a workload of less than 100 cases to ensure that customers receive needed attention; at one point, this career developer's workload approached 200. Customers have a certain time frame for receiving training or job search assistance. It can be extended, or customers can come back, but career developers work to give them as much assistance during this time period as possible.

The customer flow in the satellite offices is facilitated by their smaller size and technology. The veterans' representative sits close to the intake desk, so he or she can hear responses as the receptionist asks each customer whether he or she has served in the military. In addition, when the receptionist copies the customers' identification and creates the initial intake record the veteran records are marked with a "V." The veterans' representative sees these records as well, and can verify whether they are already registered in VOS before getting up to greet them. The veterans' representative works with the veteran to make sure the registration data are up to date and spends about 30 to 60 minutes discussing resumes, services, and next steps. This meeting was described as a "mini-TAP" session. The representative also works with eligible spouses and reported serving two to three per year. When the veterans' representative is out of the office, other staff serve the veterans if they have no identifiable barriers. For example, ex-felons are handled exclusively by the veterans' representative.

One respondent indicated that the extent to which veterans' eligibility for other programs is determined in advance of referring them depends on the program and the complexity of its requirements. Veterans interested in pursuing college courses will obviously need a high school degree, for example.

Veterans' representatives and career developers all send mass emails of applicable job postings to veterans they are serving. They will also call veterans who delay in responding to expedite services.

AJC management has a good understanding of how different program eligibility criteria intersect with military benefits and income, including retirement, and reported that partners are similarly knowledgeable. One respondent questioned why separating service members cannot be treated as category-one dislocated workers if they are leaving the military due to an ERB, for example. These individuals are not quitting the military, but are being forced out. Classification as dislocated workers would facilitate service provision.

Although there are several checkpoints for veteran status and POS for customers who are trying to obtain more than core services, customers who are visiting the AJC for only core services are unlikely to be asked about their status after the initial reception and sign-in. The self-service computers have never been so busy that AJC management has needed to check for veteran status to prioritize users. In addition to the self-service area, there is a computer lab with eight terminals for spillover use.

A veterans' representative regularly checks new registrations for veterans, and contacts these individuals. He also creates lists of transitioning service members and their discharge dates so that he can set up reminders to contact them once they have discharged to discuss POS and veteran services. The representative indicated that it would be possible to broaden representatives' reach if, during TAP, transitioning service members were to register for workforce services and also paste their resumes into the system. He advocated system improvements to get veterans to complete registration online to identify eligibility for POS sooner. Veterans' representatives also receive mass notifications of demobilization units; the notifications include preliminary information such as name, prior address, destination, MOS, and services potentially needed. Veterans' representatives reach out to these individuals to find out more about their needs.

Veterans' representatives and staff seem to use their preferred POS guidance—local or federal—to identify veterans and spouses who are eligible for POS. Some information will be available in the application; the remainder is obtained through discussion with the veteran and confirmed with the DD-214, the VA medical card, or other documentation.

Customers are given the "Passport to Employment," which was developed by the AJC. It specifies the steps customers need to follow and requires initialing when each step is complete. AJC managers and staff find this tool very helpful for reminding customers to bring in their DD-214, their UI benefits statement, and other important steps and documents. The passport lists all the workshops that customers need to attend and asks customers to obtain sign-off from the veterans' representative. It also facilitates discussions between veterans and the representatives.

3. Self-Service Materials and Systems

The AJC provides about 20 computers in the main resource room as well as telephones, copiers, and fax machines. It has equipment to make computer stations accessible to customers with impaired vision and other physical disabilities. Customers can make local and long-distance telephone calls and obtain postage for relevant uses. The self-service computers are used for assessments, research on training providers and the labor market, and job search. AJC customers

are encouraged to conduct research; intensive clients can then meet with career developers to discuss appropriate training and labor-market goals given their skills and experience.

The self-assessments and labor-market research are structured components of the Virginia's Workforce Connect system. For example, when completing self-assessments, customers click a button that says "Find Matching Occupations." They can continue to click through to find labor-market information about those occupations. Staff view this function as user-friendly and helpful for veterans needing to learn how their skills and experience fit in the civilian market. Intensive customers can obtain career-readiness certification for inclusion on their resume; staff indicated that many employers are starting to require this certification.

4. Customer Service and Reporting Systems

Virginia Workforce Connection is the customer website for the Virginia workforce services system, and VOS is the underlying statewide customer-tracking system. Customer applications are entered into VOS as new records, and it tracks all counseling, training, and job search services, including start and end dates. Both the VEC and the AJCs in Virginia use the system. Extensive registration and assessment information is collected in VOS when a record is created; to the extent possible, staff prefer that customers complete assessments and enter other registration information while at the AJC rather than from home. This approach enables staff to provide customers with assistance as needed. VOS is the VEC's system, and VEC staff have broader system access than AJC staff. For example, AJC staff cannot access employer data. Some AJC managers and staff described this as a limitation in providing services to veterans. Nevertheless, staff described VOS as user-friendly. The outstations submit monthly spreadsheets to the AJC, so all the data can be aggregated. Management can query the database for the number of veterans who have received core services, for example. They can run reports from VOS identifying veterans or disabled veterans, if, for example, an employer has a targeted job for veterans so that an email blast can be sent with the job information. The system retains records for registered customers for several years even if there is no activity. If a customer moves within the state and works with a new AJC, their record may be accessed by staff there.

AJC staff show veterans how to search in the system for employers seeking veterans. Focus group participants indicated that Workforce Connection was difficult to find and identify as a resource without guidance, and that it was flawed compared with larger sites such as Monster.com, Indeed.com, or Military.com. Although focus group participants view Workforce Connection as generally helpful, its disadvantage is that it offers the same jobs as these other websites but does not remove old postings or allow the job seeker to provide input on the status of the job. Veterans in the focus group also described the interface as clunky; the search function is not sufficiently sophisticated, and veterans described the interface as lacking a "years of experience" field.

The VEC places jobs on a 48-hour hold for veterans in VOS. Positions are visible to veterans in the system but suppressed for others until the end of the 48-hour period, when the VEC releases the job opening to the general public. Staff described "spidered-in job orders" in VOS: If an employer posts a job but does not do so exclusively through the workforce system with a job order, external sites such as Monster.com "spider-in" the posting to the VOS job bank. Job postings are also received from focused sites such as VetJobCentral. Staff review the jobs, update the O*Net codes as needed, and identify veterans with matching codes. They then send email blasts with those job postings to the identified group of veterans. Staff described this

process as an efficient and cost effective way to put targeted job openings in the hands of veterans.

The AJC runs reports from VOS to track enrollments, outcomes, and other data, and the MIS technician maintains a running spreadsheet for each intensive and training program in the AJC. For all new enrollments or training starts, the spreadsheet includes the dislocated worker, rapid response, or other program type, and whether the individual is should receive priority because he or she is a veteran, an adult, or a member of another targeted group. AJC management uses this case management spreadsheet to derive percentages and determine whether planned targets are being met. For example, the AJC has a goal that at least 51 percent of new adult dislocated worker training starts must be POS-related. Further, management is analyzing demographics of customers who may need bus tickets to travel for services and job interviews, and to shop for food.

AJC also uses the one page "Sherbert" report for monitoring counts of customers served and outcomes. This report provides a real-time snapshot of how the AJC programs are performing. The AJC sends its tracking data to the WIB, which regularly monitors this information. In addition to these monitoring tools, career developers may also track their own clients. The career developers receive many job leads and may organize their client lists to send leads to targeted subgroups, rather than their entire client list.

The AJC does not separately track outcomes for veterans and nonveterans. Managers did note that during the current recession, training outcomes have declined, as customers have taken jobs out of financial necessity and failed to complete their funded training. However, AJC management noted anecdotally that this trend does not appear common among younger veterans and military spouses; they tend to complete their training and then move into employment. Managers cited the military mindset and the financial stability afforded by military benefits as likely factors. Older veterans are more consistent with nonveterans. The AJC is not aware of any targeted state monitoring of POS, apart from a request about the number of veterans served in connection with the gold-card initiative and occasional calls from veterans' representatives for service counts. The state does monitor POS compliance and documentation as part of comprehensive annual or twice-yearly audits by the VCCS.

C. Translation of Military Experience and Skills

Respondents in the Virginia AJC indicated that good tools are in place for translation of military skills and experience and that this area has been a specific focus of the career developers and veterans' representatives, but that the process always needs improving. As indicated previously, all managers and many staff in the AJC have a military background which they utilize in the translation process; staff without a military background bring that perspective to ensure that translated skills and experience are understandable to a civilian. AJC staff also use the veterans' representatives as resources when needed during the translation process.

The AJC coordinates with its Business Services staff to understand which employers are looking for veterans, and the skills needed by the employers who are looking to hire veterans, so those can be clearly articulated as appropriate when military resumes are translated. It was also noted that resumes should use civilian key words and phrases that will be entered by employers doing computer searches, so that veterans' resumes will be identified during these searches.

AJC managers and veterans' representatives described a key part of the translation process as managing the expectations of veterans who are used to military salaries, benefits, honors, and hierarchies which provide supervisory responsibilities. In some cases, veterans believe that POS means priority for jobs. The AJC manages expectations through the workshops and the career developers. This form of translation can sometimes include military job behaviors, such as for a drill instructor who may not be able to replicate all aspects of that job, but can look for leadership positions in the civilian sector. One respondent felt it was important to carefully identify which honors to include; for example, good conduct for a younger veteran would demonstrate workplace potential, but numerous honors that would be difficult for civilians to interpret should not be included, especially honors that might suggest the veteran was in an extreme combat situation unless the veteran was targeting private security or military outsourcing firms. Veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce need to demonstrate military accomplishments but will not always be able to replicate them in the civilian sector. Multiple respondents also noted that it was important for veterans to understand the stiff competition for jobs in the civilian sector as a key factor in how they present their military skills, experience, and education on their civilian resume, especially as the military downsizes in general. They emphasized the difficulty veterans would have in replicating military salaries.

Indeed, some focus group participants reported that there were no openings at their rate, while others saw openings. Some expressed deep frustration that they expected priority for jobs, not just priority for services. They have been disappointed by what they perceive as less than deep relationships with local businesses to aid in their job search. They have also been disappointed that once they've received POS in the AJC, they are in the same job search position as civilians. This view was shared by some but not all focus group participants, and AJC staff concurred that some but not all veterans share this view.

The basic process of resume translation in the AJC is that a workforce resource facilitator or veterans' representative sits down with the veteran to transfer military experience into civilian language. Although not every career developer understands military language, they are aware what they need to ask. Managers and staff described this as an iterative process; tools can be used for initial translation but the career developers ask a lot of questions. One career developer starts by asking veterans to "walk me through your day. As much as you can tell me, walk me through." That allows the career developer to make tangible notes of skills that can be translated. For example, a veteran may not have clearly indicated military management experience in a way that is understandable to a civilian employer, so the career developer will ask about the kinds of projects overseen, the number of staff overseen, and other aspects that can be quantified to a business orientation. This was described as sometimes more useful than using online tools because the veteran must distill and describe their job for the career developer just as they must do on interviews. One career developer described this iterative process as also helping the veteran understand that they need to shift from the military to the business mindset. The resume clinics provide further information to veterans on the translation process. For example, one focus in the clinics is using action words in resumes.

Respondents noted a specific challenge in the AJC's process in that they do not currently have anyone on staff trained to teach federal resume writing. Federal resume writing is uniquely challenging but would be highly beneficial. Also, veterans do not always bring their smart transcripts indicating school credit they have received for trainings completed while in the military that may be transferrable. Career developers will ask veterans to bring these in so that the information can be included on the resume. Focus group participants in general were very

satisfied with the resume assistance provided by the AJC and indicated in particular that the resume writer provided at the transition center and in the intensive resume clinic was extremely helpful. Veterans in the focus group indicated that this resume writer had a strong understanding of veterans and the military.

There is a corresponding confidence and knowledge about the translation process in the AJC's satellite offices. In addition to the veterans' representative, several staff in the satellite office are veterans who have a good understanding of how to translate skills from military to civilian language. It was noted that the catchment area of the satellite offices is military and veteran-focused, and local employers try to hire veterans first. Some civilian employers near the satellite offices advertise for openings using military terms. They advertise with the VA and on television.

D. Challenges in Implementing POS

Managers did not report specific challenges in initially implementing POS in the AJC, stating that it was clear what needed to be done. Documents, such as the state and local policy, were created and others, such as the sign-in sheet, were modified. Respondents noted that the heavy military presence in the local area made adoption of POS less challenging; the AJC already had several partnerships in place which facilitated POS implementation.

Managers and staff did indicate that there is always more to do. For example, information dissemination is an ongoing challenge, in terms of ensuring that military and business partners, transitioning service members, and veterans are aware of the services provided by the AJC and that partnerships are strengthened. Career developers make sure that veterans are aware they have POS for AJC services. As described earlier, the AJC meets with partners like the Fleet and Family Support Program, the Marine Corps Transition Center, and Family Readiness coordinators and emails a calendar to a wide range of contacts but does not believe that information is sufficiently disseminated. It is critical to advise transitioning service members, veterans, and eligible spouses as soon as possible about AJC services while they still have access to on-base services, so there is no gap in service provision. Public service announcements were identified as another potential solution to improve dissemination about POS amid the general focus on employment for veterans.

It was noted that a related challenge is the mindset in the military community, where participation on some issues is lower than desirable. One AJC staff person with a military background described this low participation from personal experience, and thought that might be a factor. In addition, the naming of workforce services across labor, military, and veterans' agencies and private organizations can be very misleading. In some cases services have similar names in a similar catchment area but different underlying providers; that information is not apparent to the veteran seeking assistance. Specifically, it was noted that the employment commissions were planning to rename themselves "workforce centers" which will add to the confusion.

More specifically, one respondent indicated that the definition of covered spouse is challenging to implement because it is difficult to understand and apply. The AJC in fact sees very few eligible spouses self-identify for services. Because the criteria for eligible spouse can generate emotionally challenging conversations for visitors to the AJC, staff only tend to ask questions about a spouse's eligibility if "military spouse" is checked on the application. Other

definitional challenges are "other covered person" and ensuring that the codes on the DD-214 are for an other than dishonorable discharge; staff seek guidance from the veteran's representative if there is ever any question.

An ongoing challenge within this AJC is the rotation of veterans' representatives from VEC. Although not all managers and staff perceive this as a challenge, one veterans' representative noted that this rotation impedes development of collaborations between staff and relationships between specific veterans' representatives and veterans who visit the AJC frequently. It is difficult to maintain continuity in these relationships and this respondent suggested that one veterans' representative should instead be on permanent assignment to the AJC from the VEC. Focus group participants agreed that the rotation of veterans' representatives is a challenge, although they gave credit to the AJC for "doing the best they can with what they have." Focus group participants also indicated that AJC staffing would become a challenge as more veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan. Focus group participants suggested that in addition to more staff, it would be important to upgrade veterans' representatives skills so that they build stronger networks with employers to find veterans jobs.

Physical access to services is another ongoing challenge to implementing POS. Providing transportation to services is key, and as noted earlier the AJC has done this. In addition, the AJC works with the Department of Rehabilitative Services to ensure that special accommodations are available as needed for disabled veterans.

E. Promising Practices in POS Implementation

Promising practices identified in Virginia and discussed throughout this report include the following:

- Promising practices to improve POS procedures:
  - Stand-alone temporary veterans' workforce centers, such as the JFCOM Transition Center, and other outstation sites
  - Existence of state policy and local POS policy written by the WIB
  - Ongoing communication between primary and satellite sites, particularly around customer levels and the need for temporary staff reassignments
  - Ongoing staff training, including scenario based discussions of how to provide POS
  - Ability of all staff to serve veterans
  - Veteran representative contacting new veteran registrants and recently discharged service members
  - 48 hour job hold for veterans
  - Plan to institute a designated line for veterans to call with questions

- Promising practices to improve veterans' awareness of POS:
  - Outreach to military partners
  - Repetition of opportunities to identify and self-identify as veteran throughout orientation and registration process
  - Passport to Employment provided by AJC to veterans as reminder card of activities and documentation
  - Participation in ERB events, TAP, job fairs, and military spouse activities
  - Network of SNAP sites dispersed throughout the community

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Further Guidance and Dissemination of Guidance

Some AJC staff suggested that it would be helpful to have guidelines on how to explore POS eligibility with individuals who might be eligible spouses—it is not always clear with whom to broach the subject and how, given the sensitivity of the eligibility criteria. Other staff suggested expanding the guidance to include any veteran wounded in action, and any spouse of an eligible veteran.

B. Outreach and Veterans' Services

AJC managers and VEC veterans' representatives recommended co-locating to improve collaboration and support between their organizations and improve knowledge of POS and veterans' needs and services across staff. The current situation is adequate and was described as a good partnership. Veterans' representatives from the AJC are always available to answer questions and to help obtain a missing DD-214. Similarly, the VEC notifies the AJC when they refer a veteran to its service. However, co-location may lead to efficiencies in POS and services for veterans, and decreased competition across entities for funding dollars that could be streamlined to better serve veterans. Replacing the rotation of veteran representatives in the Norfolk AJC with permanently assigned veterans' representatives was also recommended so that individual representatives would become more engaged in the day-to-day operations of the AJC.

AJC management indicated that POS eligible veterans are identified more quickly and tracked more thoroughly than in the past; in addition, recent funding has been sufficient so that POS has not had to be invoked. However, improvements are needed in POS outreach and implementation. Specifically, the AJC would like to ensure that there is heightened awareness of POS in the workforce system before separation. Individuals need to receive information about POS as they are leaving the military; despite TAP, that does not seem to be happening to the extent necessary. The AJC would try to accomplish this through better, more assertive coordination with military partners; one manager suggested accessing lists of transitioning service members if feasible to improve outreach. Staff also suggested that POS be advertised in the AJC reception area, and everywhere that service members and veterans congregate such as on base and in hospitals.

AJC respondents recommended a military AJC or transition center to streamline access to priority workforce, Veterans Affairs, and medical services for transitioning service members, veterans, and eligible spouses. The standalone center outside the Norfolk Naval Base was identified as a model of how this could work. Staff in this military AJC would be dedicated to veterans; they would have targeted training and be familiar with military language. Some focus group participants also recommended a separate location for veterans. At present it is challenging for AJC management to envision dedicating the resources to this; another option would be dedicating AJC staff to serve veterans. Managers also suggested partnering with another WIB to convert the JFCOM center into a veterans' center after it closes in March 2013. Ideally such centers would be funded to eliminate the redundant provision of services by multiple agencies to the same target population. Multiple respondents felt this consolidation would save substantial amounts of money which could be used for increased services to veterans. In addition, it was

suggested that the currently competing organizations in Virginia be consolidated, as they are in Texas, to force efficiencies and eliminate duplication and competition.

Respondents recommended that access to veterans' services be streamlined both physically, in standalone centers, and through a comprehensive web-based portal. For example, staff indicated that the current DOL website does not adequately cover POS in the AJCs. It was suggested that DOL provide guidance on building better partnerships and working through the TAP program to make transitioning service members and veterans aware of POS.

Staff suggested that it would be helpful to receive feedback from veterans on how the AJC process worked for them, once they have completed receiving services. This feedback loop would be very helpful to staff in designing future POS approaches.

AJC staff recommended better connecting with the VA; specifically, the local VA has an extensive computer lab dedicated to job seeking but no AJC staff there to assist veterans. Staff expressed that the full value of workforce services may not be appreciated by other agencies and that services go significantly beyond providing computers for job search. Staff also suggested that the veterans served in the AJC could be better positioned for jobs at the VA.

Staff also recommended expanded services for veterans: a networking group so that veterans can share experiences with each other, and an unlimited bus pass while veterans are receiving AJC services so that they will have no barriers getting to training and other services.

Focus group participants suggested paying veterans' representatives on a commission basis similar to private sector recruiters, as an incentive to identify more veteran employment opportunities. These participants also suggested that VEC include a feedback channel in its jobs database so that job seekers can identify when a position is no longer open; veterans using the database find that many positions are closed and this feature will allow them to help update the database. Other helpful improvements would be identification of new postings, the number of applicants to a job posting, and their qualifications. These are current features of CareerBuilder and larger job search databases but not the VEC jobs database.

Focus group participants also recommended that the AJC automate its training voucher system so that veterans would not have to make a special trip to the AJC to sign paperwork; this can be done electronically. A larger recommendation from the focus group participants was that financial assistance should be extended to veterans who expire out of UI.

Due to the AJC's focus on training before employment, it was recommended that a new look be taken at the connection between training expenditures and outcomes. Staff emphasized the importance of adding financial training for veterans to current AJC services so that veterans can be trained to prepare a budget, manage cash flow, and understand insurance, savings, and investments.