

Best Practices for Recognition of Military Training and Experience for Occupational Credentials



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Abstract

With the military drawdown in the Middle East, over one million United States military service members are expected to leave the service over the next four years. The majority of them will seek civilian employment. The challenge for these men and women who have devoted years to serving our country will be to find jobs in the civilian workforce. Trends in recent years show that unemployment among veterans is high. The Department of Defense currently spends over \$1 billion a year on unemployment compensation for ex-service members (UCX).

While civilian employers indicate a strong desire to hire transitioning service members and veterans, they report difficulty in translating military training and experience to the skills required in the civilian workplace. Facilitating the ability of military service members and veterans to attain civilian occupational credential can alleviate this problem by demonstrating the comparability of military training and experience. This paper explores seven best practices that can be undertaken to recognize military training and experience for occupational credentialing.

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Introduction

With the military drawdown in the Middle East, over one million United States military service members are expected to leave the service over the next four years (White House, 2014). The majority of them will seek civilian employment. The challenge for these men and women who have devoted years to serving our country will be to find jobs in the civilian workforce. Trends in recent years show that unemployment among veterans, especially those in the 20 to 24 year old age range, is high (Loughran, 2014). The Department of Defense states that it currently spends almost \$1 billion a year on unemployment compensation for ex-service members (UCX). While civilian employers indicate a strong desire to hire transitioning service members and veterans, they report difficulty in translating military training and experience to the skills required in the civilian workplace (SHRM, 2010). The attainment of civilian credentials during military service has been identified in numerous studies as key to transitioning service members' and veterans' ability to translate their military training and experience, thus ensuring a smooth transition to the civilian workforce (DoD/DOL, 2005; DoD, 2012).

Occupational credentialing (certification and licensing) is an official recognition of a process of meeting a set of defined standards; generally through education, training, experience, and testing. It is intended to provide assurance that those credentialed professionals engaged in specific occupations meet acceptable standards of quality. The benefits of attaining civilian credentials for individuals both in the military and the civilian workforce are many:

- Credentials contribute to the individual's professional growth and development;
- Federal, state, or local law may require specific credentials to legally perform some jobs;
- Employers may choose to hire only individuals who have certain credential; and
- Pay rates and prospects for promotion are often enhanced for individuals holding a credential.

Civilian credentials carry even greater importance for military trained applicants because having a credential demonstrates to potential civilian employers that the veteran's skills are on par with his or her civilian counterparts who have obtained training and experience in more traditional environments.

Persons in the military receive extensive, high-quality training and the military spends tens of thousands of dollars training individual service members (GAO, 2011). This training, combined with military work experience, contributes significantly to a highly-skilled military workforce and can do the same for the civilian workforce as these individuals transfer from the military to the civilian sector. However, if a credentialing agency or civilian employer is unable to understand the applicability of military training or its equivalency to more traditional forms of workforce preparation, the Service member may be forced to repeat the training – often using government funded programs, such as the GI Bill. This can result in periods of underemployment or unemployment for veterans and it means that taxpayers are paying twice for the same type of training.

Recognizing the need to help employers understand the transferability of military skills and experience to civilian jobs, policy makers at all levels of government are looking for opportunities to promote the attainment of civilian occupational credentials (professional certifications and licenses) among active duty service members and veterans. The interest in promoting credentialing for those who have served in the military directly parallels recent initiatives to increase post-secondary credential attainment in the civilian workforce, in general (Department of Education, 2012). Because the military workforce represents a microcosm of the civilian workforce, the types of occupations held by service members are representative of the range of occupations in the civilian work force, including such areas as human

resources, food service, electronics, logistics, automotive mechanics, information technology, and healthcare. As a result, civilian credentials apply to the vast majority of military occupations.

While the benefits of promoting credentialing are great, numerous barriers to credential attainment exist for service members and veterans. These barriers must be alleviated in order to facilitate the ability of service members and veterans to attain civilian credentials and improve their opportunities in the civilian workforce. This paper presents best practices that can be undertaken to facilitate credentialing of service members and veterans. These best practices have been identified through research conducted by SOLID, LLC for numerous organizations, including the Department of Defense, each military service, and the Department of Labor. The findings from this research have significant implications for policy makers at all levels who seek to reduce veteran unemployment and ensure the smooth transition of service members into the civilian workforce.

Exhibit 1. Best Practices for Recognizing Military Training and Experience

<i>Best Practice</i>		<i>Academic Institutions</i>	<i>National Certification Agencies</i>	<i>State Licensing Agencies</i>
1	Assess Equivalency and Maximize Credit for Military Training & Experience			
A	Review military training materials to assess equivalency or accept third party reviews	●	●	●
B	Consider/accept ACE and CCAF credit recommendations/awards	●	●	●
C	Use available Service documentation to assess individual service members and veterans unique qualifications	●	●	●
D	Recognize third party program accreditation	●	●	●
E	Develop and/or recognize bridge training programs for military-trained applicants	●	●	●
F	Explicitly recognize military training and/or experience in eligibility requirements	●	●	●
G	Provide multiple pathways to meeting credential eligibility requirements, particularly when a credential requires degree attainment		●	●
H	Allow use of military training for continuing education credits to maintain credential		●	●
2	Accommodate Military's Unique Needs			
A	Recognize national certification or other national exams for state licensure			●
B	Consider waiving residency requirements			●
C	Make accommodations for deployments		●	●
D	Ensure exams are widely available		●	
3	Provide Aids to Assess Gaps			
A	Make exam domains readily available		●	●
B	Offer pre-credentialing assessment tools for service members to assess gaps prior to taking credential exam	●	●	●
C	Offer post-credentialing diagnostic tools to show areas of strengths and weaknesses	●	●	●
4	Ensure Quality/ Value			
A	Attain third party accreditation		●	●
B	Provide evidence of value of certification		●	●
C	Retain regional accreditation and inclusion on VA approved list for GI Bill	●		
5	Facilitate Third Party Payment of Credential Fees			
A	Obtain GI approval for payment of credential exam fees or courses	●	●	●
B	Accept pre-paid vouchers from military	●	●	●
6	Provide Clear Information			
A	Make clear linkages between certification and specific civilian jobs		●	●
B	Have military-specific sections of web site	●	●	●
C	Make exam preparation resources readily available	●	●	●
7	Convey Equivalency to Stakeholders			
	Promote to membership/ industry/ employers the quality and transferability of military education, training, and experience.	●	●	●

Best Practices in Recognizing Military Training and Experience

Credentialing agencies and academic institutions, in cooperation with federal and state government agencies, can take a number of steps to facilitate credentialing of service members and veterans. The remainder of this paper highlights seven key “best practices” identified to date. It is important to note that some of these best practices stand to benefit not only service members and veterans, but also the credentialing agency’s non-military constituents. An overview of the seven “best practices” is presented in Exhibit 1 above, and each is explored in more detail below.

SOLID, LLC is working with the Department of Defense and military services to provide further detail on these best practices and more information can be found by going to the services’ Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) web sites (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps COOL). Among other things, these web sites provide:

- Detailed information on credentials related to specific military occupations;
- Information on military job duties and training;
- Access to service documentation, such as service member transcripts; and
- Results of detailed gap analyses comparing military training to civilian credentialing requirements.

1. Assess the Equivalency of and Maximize Credit for Military Training and Experience

In some instances military training and experience are very closely aligned to civilian job and credential requirements and should be fully recognized as meeting credential requirements. While there is not always a 100 percent direct correspondence between military training and experience and civilian credentialing requirements, maximum credit for relevant training should be given, when feasible. A number of steps that can be taken to assess the equivalency of military training courses and/or individual service members’ training and experience and maximize credit for military training and experience, including:

- A. **Review military training materials to assess equivalency of that training course or accept reviews by third party organizations rather than trying to assess each individual service member** – the Department of Defense and military services may make some training materials available to civilian credentialing agencies or academic institutions that want to assess the equivalency of military training. Credentialing agencies can proactively review military training courses in order to assess the extent to which they meet civilian credentialing requirements. In other instances, third party organizations have reviewed military training for equivalency and the military services can rely on these reviews. For example, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing has reviewed military training against national standards for practical nurses (NCSBN, 2013). This is being used by many state licensing agencies and academic institutions nationwide.
- B. **Consider/accept American Council on Education (ACE) and Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) college credit recommendations/awards** – the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps contract with ACE to evaluate military training and recommend college credit. The results of these credit recommendations are made available in the ACE Military Guide. Similarly, the CCAF, as a regionally accredited institution, awards credit for military training. The college credit recommended or awarded is listed on the service member’s military transcripts (see 1C below). Credentialing agencies can accept the credit recommendations towards education and training

requirements.

- C. **Use available Service documentation to assess individual service members' and veterans' unique qualifications** – The Services offer formal documentation of military service members' training and experience that can be used by credentialing agencies and academic institutions much like an academic transcript is used. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps training is documented on the Joint Services Transcript, which includes college credit recommendations made by the American Council on Education (ACE) and Air Force training and college credit awards are included on the Community College of the Air Force transcript (see reference to ACE Transcripts). If a pre-assessment of military training courses has not been conducted by the credentialing agency, the agency can use military service documentation to assess the equivalency of the individual's military training and experience. Moreover, since some service members or veterans may lack awareness of this documentation, credentialing agencies can become familiar with the documentation and make military trained applicants aware of the types of service-specific documentation that are available to them.
- D. **Recognize third party program accreditation** – some military training programs have been accredited by nationally recognized program accreditors. For example, several Navy healthcare programs (i.e., surgical technologist, cardiovascular technologist, and cytotechnologist programs) are accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Professionals (CAAHEP) to meet civilian credentialing requirements. Credentialing agencies that recognize third party program accreditation will not have to undertake their own reviews of military training to assess equivalency.
- E. **Develop and/or recognize bridge training programs for military-trained applicants** – if military training provides partial credit towards credit requirements, credentialing agencies and academic institutions should recognize this and not require Service members or Veterans to repeat training they have received. Rather, they should provide credit for the military training and either create bridge programs targeted to training gaps or recognize bridge programs created by others.
- F. **Explicitly recognize military training and/or experience in eligibility requirements** – if a credentialing agency has determined that certain military training or experience meets their requirements, it is helpful for them to specifically state that in the credential eligibility requirements so that service members can better assess the extent to which they meet these requirements.
- G. **Provide multiple pathways to meeting credential eligibility requirements, particularly when a credential requires degree attainment** – when practical, allow service members to demonstrate competency through a combination of education, training, and experience rather than relying solely on a degree. For example, an agency might accept four years of related experience in lieu of an Associate degree.
- H. **Allow use of military training for continuing education credits to maintain credential** – if continuing education credits are required to maintain a certification or license, the credentialing agency should consider allowing military training to meet these requirements.

2. Accommodate Military's Unique Needs

A number of factors that are unique to military Service members can make it difficult for them to attain and/or maintain credentials. Credentialing agencies can take the following steps to accommodate the unique needs of the military Service member:

- A. **Recognize national certification or other national exams for state licensure** – state licensing agencies can recognize national certification exams or other national exams for state licensure purposes rather than requiring a state-specific exam. It is easier for a service member to maintain a national certification during military service than to try to maintain a state license due to residency requirements and since service members often do not know which state they will settle in upon transition from the military.
- B. **Consider waiving residency requirements** – state licensing agencies can waive residency requirements for service members so they can attain licenses in the state in which they currently reside even if it is not their state of legal residence.
- C. **Make accommodations for deployments** – Service members who are deployed may have difficulty meeting recertification requirements (e.g., continuing education units) or the period for which their credential is valid may expire while they are deployed. Credentialing agencies can extend recertification requirements for deployed service members.
- D. **Ensure exams are widely available** – Service members are often geographically dispersed and need easy access to credential exams. In addition, they may not be able to take exams that are offered only periodically throughout the year due to duty assignments. Credentialing agencies can consider using national testing companies to make their credentials widely available and/or can offer credential exams on demand.

3. Provide Aids to Assess Gaps

The military Services have undertaken numerous initiatives to conduct gap analyses between military training and civilian credentialing requirements. Credentialing agencies can take steps to make it easier for them to conduct these analyses. They can also take steps to make it easier for individual Service members and Veterans to assess their own unique gaps prior to taking an exam or if they fail the exams.

- A. **Make exam domains readily available** – Gap analyses conducted by the military typically involve comparing military training learning objectives to credential exam domains in order to identify the extent to which the material covered by an exam domain is covered by military training. Through the services COOL programs, this type of analysis is routinely conducted to allow Service members to target their study or preparation to just those areas where there are gaps. Credentialing agencies should make their exam domains easily available, with as much detail as possible without compromising the security of the exam, so the gaps can be identified.
- B. **Offer pre-credentialing assessment tools for Service members to assess gaps prior to taking credential exam** – Service members can better assess their ability to pass a credential exam and/or target areas of further study if the credentialing agency offers pre-credentialing assessment tools.

- C. **Offer post-credentialing diagnostic tools to show areas of strength and weaknesses** – For those Service members or Veterans who fail their initial attempt to pass an exam, credentialing agencies should offer post-credentialing diagnostic tools to show areas of the exam on which they should concentrate prior to retaking the exam.

4. Ensure Quality/Value

Service members and veterans need to be confident that the credential that they pursue and pay for (or use their government benefits to pay for) holds value. Organizations can help Service members and Veterans discriminate among different credentials to find those that are worthwhile and that are not part of “certification mills” by attaining third party accreditation for their credentials and by publicizing industry-based research that demonstrates the value of the credential in the civilian workforce. Implementing this best practice is good not just for Service members and Veterans but for the general population as well.

- A. **Attain third party accreditation** – the two primary national accreditors of credential programs are the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). ANSI and NCCA accredit to industry-recognized standards for quality credentials. Attaining accreditation provides service members and veterans (and others) assurance that the credential is of high quality.
- B. **Provide evidence of value of certification** – it is easier for credential seekers to choose among competing credentials if they have a clear understanding of the value it holds in the civilian workforce. Credentialing agencies can document value by disseminating research on their credentials that shows that it is in demand by business and affects hiring or career advancement decisions. This information should be easily found on the credentialing agency’s web site.
- C. **Retain accreditation and inclusion on VA approved list for GI Bill** – In order for a service member or veteran to be eligible to be reimbursed for academic course work through the GI Bill, the academic institution must meet the accreditation requirements and be approved for listing by the Department of Veterans Affairs (Department of Veterans Affairs). Credentialing agencies should ensure that they meet these requirements.

5. Facilitate Third Party Payment of Credential Fees

Service members and veterans have some options for getting credential fees paid for by a third party. For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs will pay for credential exam fees (up to \$2,000 per test) and the Navy has a discretionary program for the payment of credential fees related to Sailors’ ratings.

- A. **Obtain VA approval for GI Bill payment of credential exam fees or courses** – in order for a Service member or Veteran to be reimbursed for credential exam fees, the credentialing agency must have first attained approval for its credential program from the Department of Veterans Affairs (Department of Veterans Affairs). Credentialing agencies should obtain approval so Service members and Veterans can utilize this benefit.
- B. **Accept pre-paid vouchers from military** – the Navy offers Sailors pre-paid vouchers to take credential exams and other services are considering doing the same thing. The vouchers must be secured in advance through an agreement between the Navy’s credential program office and

the credentialing agencies. Credentialing agencies should be willing to accept pre-paid vouchers.

6. Provide Clear Information

Credentialing agency web sites can be confusing, especially for Service members or Veterans who may not be as familiar with the related civilian occupations or the civilian career field. Service members need to be able to:

- Quickly determine the relevancy of the credential to their military occupation and potential civilian career choice;
- Understand how their military training and experience can help qualify them for a credential; and
- Find exam preparation resources readily.

Credentialing agencies can ensure that clear and concise information is presented on their web sites about the credentials they offer. Some of the steps that credentialing agencies can take to facilitate this include:

- A. **Make clear linkages between the certification and specific civilian jobs** – while some credentials clearly relate to a specific civilian occupation, for others it is difficult to discern to whom the credential applies. Credential agencies should be very clear about the jobs to which their credentials apply.
- B. **Have military-specific sections of web site** – this section can provide information on:
 - Credentialing agency’s military-specific credentialing requirements;
 - Resources available to pay for credentials (e.g., Navy COOL program and GI Bill); and
 - Service documentation available to document military training and experience.
- C. **Make exam preparation resources readily available** – Service members and Veterans, like the general population, need to be able to easily access information on courses, study materials, and other exam preparation materials.

7. Convey Equivalency of Military Training and Experience to Stakeholders

Credentialing agencies can help convey to their stakeholders the transferability of military training and experience to promote greater recognition. Credential agency stakeholders, particularly industry representatives and employers, need to understand the quality and equivalency of military education, training, and experience in order for them to provide maximum credit to Service members and Veterans. It stands to reason that in countries that practice conscription (i.e., compulsory military service), employers have a much better understanding of the transferability of military skills because they have direct experience with military training. However, this is not the case in the United States.

In a June 2010 Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) study, 60 percent of employers reported that “translating military skills to civilian job experience” was a challenge to hiring employees with military experience (SHRM 2010). This gap in understanding becomes more acute as a smaller and smaller percentage of American society at large has served in the armed forces and therefore have less first hand familiarity with the training, skills, and experiences former Service members bring to the civilian labor pool. These same employers, however, cite their confidence in the benefits of hiring

employees with military experience. More than 90 percent of employers polled said they recognize the following attributes in former service members:

- Strong sense of responsibility
- Ability to work under pressure
- Ability to see a task through to completion
- Strong leadership skills
- High degree of professionalism
- Strong problem-solving skills

When asked to what extent various initiatives would assist in their organization’s efforts to recruit and hire military Veterans, employers consistently reported their desire for programs “to help veterans transition their military skills to the civilian workforce” and “assistance identifying and reaching out to qualified veterans.” Clearly, employers are amenable to hiring Veterans, they just have difficulty understanding the relevancy of military training and experience to their job openings and locating qualified veterans. Credentialing agencies can make their stakeholders aware of the transferability of military training and experience by:

- Collecting statistics on the pass rates for Service members and Veterans and publicizing them;
- Publicizing military-specific eligibility requirements; and
- Publicizing other positive traits of Service members and Veterans.

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