

Building Talent Marketplaces Series

Resource Series | Building Block 3



Making Military Skills Visible:

A State Guide to Including Military-Connected Residents in Talent Marketplaces



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Building Talent Marketplaces Series

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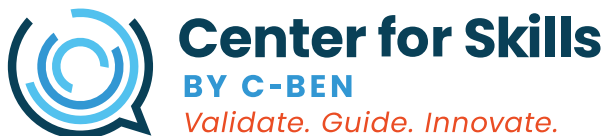
A State Guide to Including Military-Connected Residents in Talent Marketplaces

Authors:

Lauren Runco Bevilacqua • Sytease Geib

Produced by the Center for Skills by C-BEN (CFS x C-BEN)

In partnership with the National Governors Association



C-BEN, in partnership with NGA, supports states through policy design, governance frameworks, and technical assistance helping leaders move from vision to implementation while maintaining continuity, trust, and bipartisan credibility.

About the Authors

Lauren Runco Bevilacqua

Vice President of Innovation, Strategy & Delivery | Solutions for Information Design, Inc. (SOLID)

Lauren has spent more than two decades working at the intersection of military service, workforce development, higher education, and credentialing. As a former military spouse, she experienced firsthand the translation gap that prevents military-connected workers from being seen for what they can actually do. Her work at SOLID focuses on rigorous analysis of military training and occupations — examining curricula, occupational requirements, training standards, and performance expectations — to map military-acquired capabilities to civilian workforce competencies. She leads initiatives including Map My Future® (MMF) and believes the future of skills translation lies in human-in-the-loop AI: technology that accelerates insights, with experienced analysts and subject matter experts ensuring those insights are validated and communicated responsibly.

Sytease Geib

Skills-First Initiatives | National Governor's Association (NGA)

Sytease Geib is a workforce development strategist and skills-first hiring advocate who has focused her career on building systems that see talent clearly — especially talent that traditional hiring infrastructure is designed to miss. A 40 Under 40 honoree, she brings a practitioner's lens to the Special Operations veteran community and to the broader argument that hiring military connected talent is not a veteran support initiative — it is a skills-first talent strategy grounded in measurable, portable capabilities that drive business outcomes. Her work centers on building the employer understanding and system infrastructure needed to turn validated military competence into visible, trusted labor market signals.



About This Resource

This guide is part of the Building Talent Marketplaces implementation series, produced by the Center for Skills by C-BEN (CFS x C-BEN) in partnership with the National Governors Association. It corresponds to Building Block 3: Public Trust and Stewardship for Employers and Residents. This resource is meant to be used alongside the other implementation tools in the series.

It is designed for state workforce leaders, Governors' offices, state higher education executive officers agencies (SHEEOs), state workforce agencies, and talent marketplace administrators working to build skills-based talent systems that are equitable, inclusive, and built to scale. States participating in the Powering Trust in Skills cohort will find this guide especially actionable as a companion to their North Star Goal development and governance planning work.

This resource makes the case — and provides a practical roadmap — for intentionally including military-connected residents in state talent marketplace infrastructure. It is organized around the other three core building blocks of talent marketplace development: governance and multi-agency accountability, data and technology infrastructure, and incentives and policy alignment for credentialing agencies. State leaders can use it to audit existing systems, identify design gaps, prioritize policy actions, and coordinate across the agencies and partners needed to make military skills visible, portable, and trusted in civilian labor markets.

The Core Argument

Those with military service don't lack skills. They lack the translation of those skills and trusted ways to verify them. Every state has a significant and underutilized talent asset: its military-connected population. Active-duty service members, National Guard members, ROTC cadets, veterans, and military families have accumulated deep, validated, high-demand competencies. Yet most state talent marketplace systems were not built to recognize them. This guide shows state leaders how to fix this oversight — and why doing so strengthens both equity and economic outcomes.

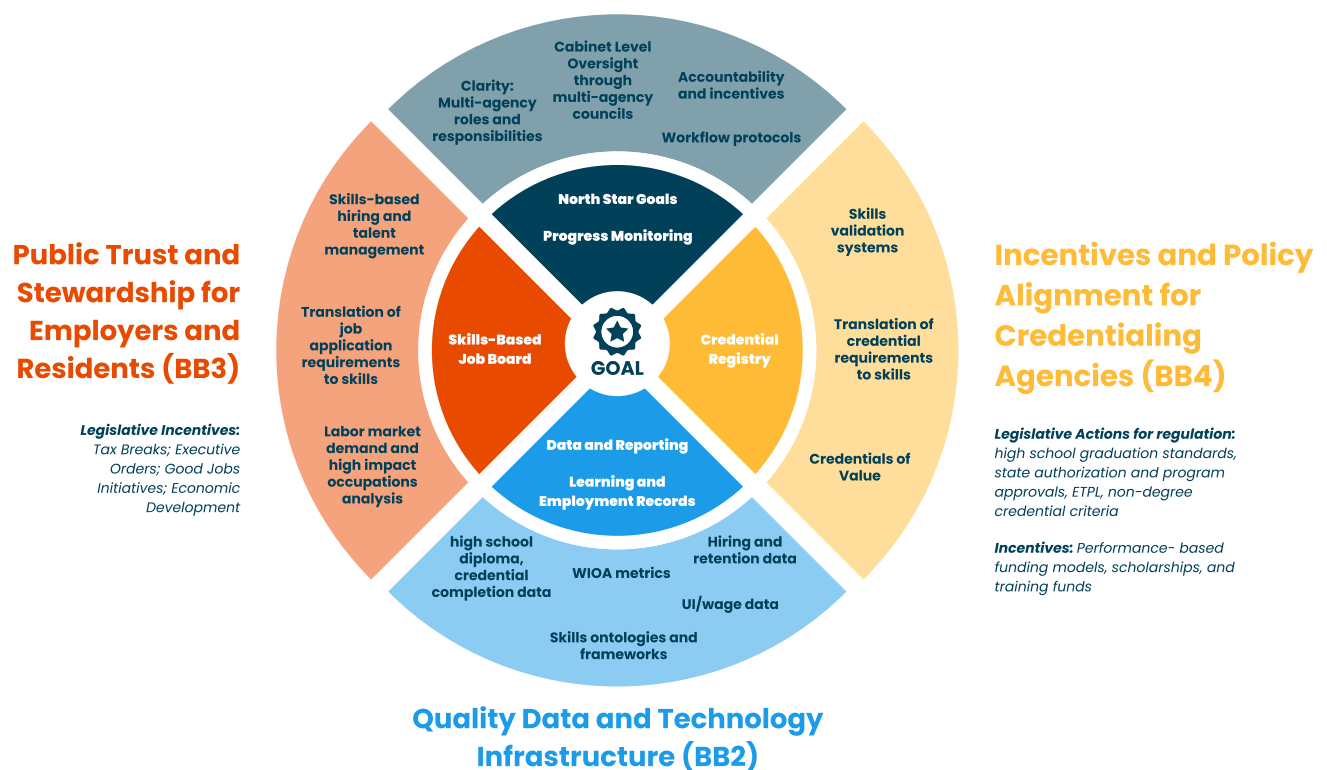
The Four Building Blocks of a Functioning Talent Marketplace

A talent marketplace functions most effectively when four interconnected building blocks are aligned. Fragmented actions in one or two building blocks limit impact across the system. Governments are advised to use this implementation guide to ensure requirements are being met across all four building blocks. The full set of implementation tools can be found at www.centerforskills.org.

Building Block (BB)	What It Requires	Implementation Tools
BB1-Cross-Agency Governance	Cabinet-level oversight, shared North Star goals, defined decision rights, and formal accountability structures that span agencies	1. Building Talent Marketplaces: A Shared Vision for Trust through Governance 2. Policy Components of Governing Talent Marketplaces 3. Cross-Agency Implementation Companion 4. Financing Talent Marketplaces
BB2-Quality Data and Technology Infrastructure	Interoperable systems with shared definitions, privacy-protected transparency, and data that flows from learning through employment	Public Engagement and Governance Models for Skills Ontologies
BB3-Public Trust and Stewardship for Employers and Residents	Skills-based hiring practices, validated competency frameworks, and mechanisms to translate employer demand into signals that education and training providers can act on	Employer and Resident Engagement Playbook
BB4-Incentives and Policy Alignment for Credentialing Agencies	Transparent standards for credential value, performance-aligned funding, and consistent validation of learning outcomes	Governing for Quality, Personalizing for People: Governing the Education and Training Ecosystem

These four building blocks offer a framework on how best to audit your talent marketplace systems.

Cross-Agency Governance (BB1)





Section I:

Understanding the Military-Connected Population in Your State

States that want to build effective talent marketplaces must first understand who is in their labor force. The military-connected population is not a monolith — it includes distinct groups with different needs, different connections to the state workforce system, and different barriers to visibility in civilian talent markets.

For purposes of this paper, “military occupational training and experience” refers collectively to the education, training, certifications, work experiences, leadership responsibilities, operational assignments, and demonstrated competencies acquired throughout military service.

Who Is in Your State’s Military-Connected Workforce?

Population	State Workforce Connection	Primary Barrier to Marketplace Inclusion
Active-Duty Service Members	Living in state, often employed on base; may seek civilian employment near end of service	Military-acquired skills are not yet comprehensively identified, validated, and aligned to competency frameworks or credential registries
National Guard and Reserve members	Employed in civilian jobs while serving part-time; dual-system earners with validated military and civilian skills	Military-acquired skills are not yet comprehensively identified, validated, and aligned to competency frameworks or credential registries

Population	State Workforce Connection	Primary Barrier to Marketplace Inclusion
ROTC Cadets	Enrolled in higher education; commissioning upon graduation	Military competencies are not universally recognized in academic credential systems or LERs
Veterans / Transitioning Service Members	Entering or re-entering civilian labor force; high motivation, high competency, significant translation gap	Joint Services Transcript (JST), Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) transcript, and Verification of Military Experience and Training (VMET) records contain information about military service, training, and experience but were not designed to serve as portable, interoperable skills records within today's skills-based hiring ecosystem
Military Spouses and Families	Highly mobile; frequently interrupted civilian careers; often highly -educated and underemployed	Credentials earned in other states are not always universally portable; employment gaps penalized by Applicant Tracking System (ATS)

Understanding these distinctions matters because the policy levers for each group are different — and the talent marketplace infrastructure must be designed to serve all of them.

The Strategic Case: Why This Matters for Every State

Military-connected inclusion is not a niche equity initiative. It is a mainstream workforce strategy with direct implications for state economic competitiveness, employer access to talent, and the return on public investment in talent marketplace infrastructure.

Veterans have served our country with honor. Now it's time we serve them — with systems that recognize their value, with tools that unlock new career paths, and with a commitment to equity that doesn't stop at "thank you for your service." Let's stop asking veterans to prove their worth and build a system that sees it clearly.

If your state...	Then military-connected inclusion...
Has a significant active-duty or Guard population	Builds your talent pipeline and reduces employer shortfalls in high-demand sectors without new training investment — these workers are already skilled and validated and represent an opportunity for states to retain, attract, and reconnect military-connected talent to in-state employers
Is investing in LER and credential registry infrastructure	Military-inclusive design increases utilization and equity outcomes without requiring a separate system, while enabling military-connected learners and workers to carry verified skills records across state lines without losing visibility, recognition, or career momentum. Because the military is both a major training provider and employer, building LER ecosystems that can accurately represent military learning strengthens the infrastructure for all learners and workers.

If your state...	Then military-connected inclusion...
Has military installations, National Guard populations, or residents serving outside the state	Creates opportunities to identify, engage, and retain future talent through military transition pathways, Home of Record connections, and talent marketplace infrastructure before service members enter the civilian labor market.
Is a Powering Trust in Skills cohort member	Military portability agreements with other cohort states build the interstate infrastructure your whole system needs
Has employers facing talent shortages in technical fields	Military veterans disproportionately hold high-demand technical competencies that degree-based hiring screens out



If your state...	Then military-connected inclusion...
Is serving a 'some college, no degree' population	Many military-connected learners fit this profile and are ideal candidates for CBE pathways and prior learning recognition

Section II: The Translation Problem — Why Military Skills Disappear

The core challenge for military-connected residents is not that they lack skills. It is that the systems designed to make skills visible in civilian labor markets were not built with military experience in mind. The result is a translation gap that costs states talent, costs veterans opportunity, and costs employers access to some of the most rigorously trained workers in the country.

Military service doesn't lack skills. It lacks translation — and trusted ways to verify those skills.

— Lauren Runco Bevilacqua

A Personal Window Into a Systemic Problem

Lauren Runco Bevilacqua has spent more than two decades at the intersection of military service and workforce development. But this is not just a professional issue for her — it is a personal one. Her former husband served as an 11B Infantryman and separated from the Army as an E4 after years of training and operational experience that required leadership, decision-making under pressure, adaptability, and teamwork. When he began looking for civilian work, the opportunities consistently presented to him were security guard roles. Not because of a lack

of capability, but because the system simply did not know how to interpret what he knew and could do.

That story is not exceptional. It is the norm for thousands of service members separating from the military every year — people with deep expertise in logistics, cybersecurity, healthcare, manufacturing, and dozens of other fields, who struggle to communicate that experience in ways civilian employers can recognize and value. The problem is not talent. The problem is translation and verification.

Sytease Geib encountered the same challenge from a different perspective. After spending more than 15 years supporting military transitions and helping employers understand the value of military talent, she believed she was prepared when her husband completed ten years of service in Special Operations. He held two advanced degrees and had received more than a million dollars' worth of leadership, operational, and technical training through the Department of Defense. Yet despite those qualifications, employers often struggled to understand how his experience as a Human Intelligence Collector translated to civilian roles. Like many veterans, he ultimately accepted a position below his potential—not because he lacked the skills to succeed, but because the hiring system lacked a trusted way to recognize and validate them. His experience reflects a broader challenge facing military-connected talent today, while also highlighting the promise of skills-based hiring, digital credentials, and Learning and Employment Records (LERs) to make military skills more transparent, visible, and trusted.

Skills Earned Under Pressure, Invisible in the Market

Consider what a Special Operations veteran has actually done. They have led teams under high-stakes, time-compressed conditions. Managed complex logistics in unpredictable environments. Demonstrated technical proficiency across communications, medical care, intelligence analysis, and equipment operation. They have been selected through assessment pipelines with attrition rates that often exceed 60% to 80% among already high-performing service members — pipelines specifically designed to filter for judgment under ambiguity, learning velocity, cognitive adaptability, emotional regulation, and leadership potential.

In industrial-organizational psychology, structured selection of this kind is one of the strongest predictors of performance — stronger than experience alone. These are not hypothetical competencies. They were validated in the most demanding performance environments that exist. Yet when that veteran submits a resume, civilian applicant tracking systems often cannot read the military occupational codes (MOC), ratings, or classification systems in which that experience is recorded.

In a labor market defined by disruption, digital acceleration, and compressed decision cycles, the competitive advantage is no longer pedigree — it's validated skills under pressure, and that is exactly what our military members, especially those in the Special Operations Community, possess.

— Sytease Geib

The Four Structural Layers of the Translation Gap

The translation problem is not a matter of effort or motivation. It is a structural design failure with three distinct layers:

1. Disconnected Skills Infrastructure

Military training, education, and experience are documented in records such as the JST, VMET, and DD-214; however, these systems were designed to support military administration, service verification, and academic credit evaluation—not skills-based hiring. As a result, military-acquired competencies are not consistently translated into workforce-recognized skills signals that can be readily understood and utilized by employers, talent marketplaces, and credentialing ecosystems.

2. Missing Skills-to-Skills Translation

The civilian talent marketplace ecosystem relies on skills ontologies and competency frameworks—such as O*NET, CTDL, and employer-defined competency libraries—to connect learner records, credentials, and workforce experiences to employment opportunities. While military occupations are often mapped to civilian occupations, the underlying military-acquired skills have not been comprehensively identified, verified, and aligned to these workforce frameworks at the level of specificity required for skills-based hiring and automated matching. A logistics specialist in the military may have experience managing supply chains, coordinating transportation networks, overseeing inventory systems, and leading teams in complex operational environments. Those capabilities align directly with advanced manufacturing, distribution, and operations management, but they are not always visible to employers because the underlying skills and competency language have not been systematically translated into the frameworks that power modern workforce systems.

3. Classified and Restricted Competencies

For service members in special operations, intelligence, and other restricted career fields, the problem is compounded: the most impressive and high-value competencies derived from both training and experience often cannot be disclosed on a public credential or resume. A veteran who directed multi-agency operations, developed actionable intelligence products, or commanded unconventional warfare missions may be entirely unable to document what they actually did beyond vague statements. The Special Operations Forces community often struggles most to translate their experience in a way that is visible and trusted by civilians — not because the skills are absent, but because the system has no pathway to see them.

The veterans who are hardest to place in civilian employment are frequently those with the deepest, most validated competency profiles. The system's inability to see them is not a reflection of their readiness — it is a reflection of a design gap that states can help fix.

4. Dual-Career and Hidden Skills Ecosystems

For National Guard and Reserve members, the translation challenge operates differently. Unlike active-duty service members who eventually transition into civilian employment, Guard and Reserve personnel simultaneously navigate two professional identities: military service and civilian employment. They may develop advanced leadership, cybersecurity, logistics, healthcare, engineering, emergency management, or technical skills through military training and deployments while maintaining full-time civilian careers in entirely different occupations. As a result, critical military-acquired competencies often remain invisible within civilian workforce records, talent marketplaces, and employer systems. Workforce agencies may only see the civilian occupation. Military systems may only capture military service. Neither system provides a complete picture of the individual's capabilities. This creates a hidden talent problem in which valuable skills are developed, validated, and actively used but are not connected to the workforce infrastructure that informs hiring, career navigation, credentialing, or economic development strategies. Without intentional integration, states risk overlooking one of their largest and most highly trained talent pools, while Guard and Reserve members lose opportunities to fully leverage the breadth of their skills across both military and civilian careers.

Why Technology Alone Cannot Close the Gap

In recent years, AI-powered skills translation tools have emerged to help surface connections between military experience and civilian workforce requirements. These tools can significantly accelerate the process of identifying possible skill alignments — and they hold genuine promise. But translation alone is not enough.

Tip: A useful way to think about this is to compare a Joint Services Transcript (JST) to an academic transcript. If you wanted to understand the skills someone developed in college, you wouldn't rely on the transcript alone—you'd also look at the course syllabi to understand what was actually taught. The same is true for military learning. A JST is an important record of completed training, but it summarizes the learning rather than capturing the underlying training itself. Trusted skills analysis requires looking beyond the record to the evidence behind it.

For skills to be portable across education and workforce systems, they must also be accurate, contextualized, and trusted by employers. Most translation tools map Military Occupation Codes (MOCs) to O*NET occupations at a broad level—generating generic civilian job titles rather than the specific competency statements needed for skills-based matching. Many tools rely primarily on records such as the JST or occupational descriptions rather than analyzing the underlying military training, occupational requirements, and other authoritative source materials. As a result, translation outputs are not independently verified; they describe what a role is typically expected to include, not what an individual actually learned or demonstrated. And for classified career fields, automated translation tools are, by definition, unable to capture what matters most.

The future of skills translation lies in human-in-the-loop AI: technology that accelerates insights, combined with experienced analysts and subject matter experts who ensure those insights are validated and communicated responsibly. When employers—particularly in sectors like advanced manufacturing—want to know, “Can this candidate do the work?” they need an answer grounded in rigorous analysis of the underlying evidence, not just algorithmic crosswalks. States building talent marketplace infrastructure should design for this distinction from the start.



Section III:

What States Can Do — A Policy and Infrastructure Action Guide

Federal grants and state investments in talent marketplaces cannot achieve their intended outcomes if they exclude a population that already resides in every state and already holds validated, high-demand skills. This resource is part of Building Block 3: Public Trust and Stewardship for Employers and Residents. The following actions are organized around the other three core building blocks of talent marketplace infrastructure.

Building Block 1: Governance and Multi-Agency Accountability

Military-connected inclusion requires explicit governance decisions. It will not happen by default.

Name the population in your governance framework

Most state talent marketplace governance documents describe priority populations in broad terms. That's not enough. States in the Powering Trust in Skills cohort should explicitly name military-connected residents — including active-duty, Guard, Reserve, ROTC, veterans, and military families — as a designated priority population in their North Star Goals and progress monitoring frameworks.

Establish a military-civilian data bridge coordination role

Assign clear responsibility for coordinating between the state's workforce system and the relevant military installations, National Guard bureau, and VA-connected programs. In states with significant military populations, this may warrant a dedicated position or interagency working group. The coordination function should connect directly to the state's LER infrastructure.

Integrate military learning into Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and credential registry governance

Review state ETPL policies and credential registry requirements to determine whether military occupational training and experience, including formal military occupational training, professional military education, specialized training, apprenticeship experiences, operational assignments, leadership responsibilities, and documented military learning records (of which the Joint Services Transcript (JST) is one example), are eligible for inclusion and recognition. Identify accreditation, policy, or administrative barriers that may unintentionally exclude validated military learning, and pursue opportunities to address those barriers to improve workforce and education outcomes for service members and veterans.

Include military transition programs in state workforce system convening

Military Transition Assistance Programs (TAP), installation-based education offices, and many military-serving organizations frequently operate alongside—rather than as part of—state workforce systems. Governors' offices can use their convening authority to bring these stakeholders into shared governance and planning discussions, improve coordination across systems, and align programs, data, and outcomes in support of service members, veterans, and employers.

Establish formal partnerships with National Guard leadership

Governors' offices and state workforce leaders should establish formal partnerships with The Adjutant General (TAG) and National Guard leadership to ensure Guard members are intentionally included in statewide workforce and talent development strategies. As both military service members and civilian employees, Guard personnel represent a significant source of skilled talent within every state, yet they are often absent from workforce planning discussions and data-sharing efforts. Regular coordination can help states better understand military talent supply, align workforce investments with military-connected populations, strengthen employer connections, and create clearer pathways for translating military training and experience into civilian education and employment opportunities. Integrating National Guard leadership into workforce governance structures helps ensure that the National Guard talent pipeline is not treated as a separate system, but as a core component of the state's broader talent strategy.

Leverage Home of Record Data for Talent Attraction and Retention

States should work with military installations, transition programs, National Guard leadership, and federal partners to better understand where military-connected talent originates, where it currently resides, and where it intends to live after separation from service. Home of Record data, state of legal residence information, and military transition data can provide valuable insights into future talent flows that are rarely incorporated into state workforce planning.

Many service members stationed outside their home state intend to return after military service. Others establish roots near installations where they serve. States that understand these patterns can proactively connect military-connected talent to employers, education pathways, apprenticeship opportunities, and talent marketplaces before transition occurs. Incorporating military talent flow data into workforce planning enables states to compete more effectively for skilled workers while strengthening long-term talent retention strategies.

Building Block 2: Data and Technology Infrastructure

The most important infrastructure action states can take is making military learning, experience, and skills visible and usable within civilian talent marketplace systems.

Connect Talent Marketplaces to Military Transition Pathways

States should integrate talent marketplace infrastructure with military transition pathways rather than waiting until service members enter the civilian workforce. Military Transition Assistance Programs (TAP), SkillBridge programs, installation education offices, and National Guard employment initiatives create natural opportunities to introduce service members to state workforce systems before separation.

States should enable transitioning service members to create learner-controlled skills profiles, connect military learning records to Learning and Employment Records (LERs), and explore in-state employment opportunities while still serving. By creating early visibility between military talent and civilian employers, states can reduce talent outmigration, strengthen employer hiring pipelines, and improve retention of highly skilled workers within the state economy.

Integrate Military Learning and Service Records into State LER Ecosystems

The Joint Services Transcript (JST) and Verification of Military Experience and Training (VMET) provide verifiable records of military education, training, and experience. States should work with LER vendors, military education offices, and workforce partners to establish secure data-sharing and ingestion pathways that enable military learning and service records to contribute to learner-controlled digital records and workforce profiles. However, integrating military records into an LER is only the first step. States should also ensure these records are paired with trusted skills analysis that accurately translates military learning into meaningful workforce signals rather than relying solely on automated extraction from the records themselves.

This capability is already being demonstrated through the Department of War's MilGears platform. MilGears is a career and credential navigation platform that helps individuals understand how their education, training, and experience align with occupations, credentials, and career pathways, while providing specialized capabilities for translating military learning and experience. MilGears is directly integrated with the Joint Services Transcript (JST), allowing eligible users to securely import verified military learning records into a learner-controlled Learning and Employment Record (LER). Built using the Comprehensive Learner Record (CLR) 2.0 standard, the MilGears LER combines verified military learning records with military occupational analysis to create a portable record that users can download and share with compatible digital wallets, talent marketplaces, and other interoperable systems.

Develop and adopt competency mapping protocols for military-acquired skills

Rather than relying solely on MOC-to-O*NET translation, states should work with their workforce, education, and skills governance bodies to identify and align military-acquired skills to the state's adopted competency frameworks, skills ontologies, and credential registries at the specific competency statement level. This enables genuine skills-based matching, connecting what a veteran can do to what an employer actually needs, rather than relying on occupation-level approximations. This analysis requires the depth of review represented by tools like Map My Future®—examining curricula, occupational requirements, training standards, and performance expectations together, not simply translating military job titles. CFS and C-BEN can support states in this work.

Develop trusted interpretation frameworks for sensitive military career fields

States should recognize that not all military experience can—or should—be translated into detailed competency records. For service members from Special Operations Forces (SOF), intelligence, cyber, and other sensitive career fields, attempting to document every skill, mission, or operational capability may be neither feasible nor appropriate. Instead, states should develop interpretation frameworks that help workforce professionals, credentialing organizations, and employers understand the significance of military-earned indicators of capability, such as selection into elite organizations, successful completion of rigorous qualification pipelines, leadership responsibilities, sustained performance in high-consequence environments, and the ability to obtain and maintain security clearances.

These frameworks should rely on publicly available information about military occupational communities, organizational missions, and qualification standards rather than requiring the completion of increasingly granular data fields that may inadvertently reveal sensitive or classified capabilities when aggregated across large populations. The objective is not to reconstruct classified experiences or create detailed inventories of military capabilities, but to help employers and workforce systems recognize that the military has already conducted extensive assessment, selection, training, and validation processes. Where appropriate, states should treat these military-earned qualifications, affiliations, and demonstrated achievements as trusted indicators of capability, adaptability, judgment, and performance, reducing the burden on service members to repeatedly prove the value of experiences that cannot be fully disclosed.

Build geographic portability into LER and credential infrastructure from the start

Military families move. A service member stationed in your state today may be in another state in 18 months. Talent marketplace infrastructure must be designed for portability using open, interoperable standards such as W3C Verifiable Credentials and Open Badges 3.0, ensuring that skills and credentials recognized in one state can be recognized and utilized in another. The Powering Trust in Skills cohort, spanning 33 states, territories, and tribal governments, offers a vehicle for coordinating these portability standards and interoperability efforts at scale.

Building Block 3: Incentives and Policy Alignment for Credentialing Agencies

Recognition of military learning requires deliberate policy action by institutions and agencies that set credential standards.

Require credit for prior learning (CPL) policies that include military experience

State higher education agencies and postsecondary institutions should maintain documented Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) policies that explicitly recognize military learning and experience. These policies should extend beyond accepting Joint Services Transcript (JST) credit recommendations and include multiple prior learning assessment (PLA) pathways, such as portfolio assessment, challenge exams, competency demonstrations, and other validated methods for recognizing military-acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities that may not be fully captured through traditional academic credit equivalencies.

Align licensure and certification requirements to recognize military learning and experience

Many military-connected workers face unnecessary barriers to occupational licensure because state licensing boards do not recognize military training as equivalent to civilian credentialing pathways. This is particularly acute in healthcare, emergency management, aviation, logistics, and cybersecurity where military personnel develop substantial technical and professional competencies.. States should audit licensure and certification requirements in high-demand fields and establish military equivalency pathways where they do not exist.

Use performance-based funding to incentivize recognition of military learning

States can use scholarship criteria, training fund eligibility, program approval standards, and performance-based funding models to incentivize providers to develop pathways that recognize and build on military learning. Programs that award CPL for military-acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities; align military-acquired skills to workforce competency frameworks; and demonstrate positive education, credential attainment, and employment outcomes for military-connected learners should be prioritized in performance-based funding decisions.

Build employer recognition and support for skills-based military hiring

Employers who adopt skills-based hiring practices that explicitly recognize military competencies, rather than relying on degree proxies or job title equivalency, should be recognized and supported by state economic development and workforce agencies. The shift toward skills-based hiring represents a significant opportunity for the military-connected community: military service is inherently skills-rich, and employers increasingly want to know not what credential a candidate holds, but whether that candidate can do the work. States can provide the translation tools, competency mapping resources, and talent marketplace access that employers need to evaluate military candidates on that basis.



Section IV: The Special Case of Special Operations Veterans

Within the broader military-connected population, Special Operations Forces (SOF) veterans present a distinct opportunity — and a distinct challenge. They are among the most rigorously validated workers in any talent market. And they are often the hardest for civilian systems to see.

Hiring Operators is not a veteran support initiative. It is a skills-first talent strategy grounded in measurable, portable capabilities that drive business outcomes.

— Sytease Geib

The competencies that SOF selection and training develop are precisely the capabilities that modern organizations struggle most to find and reliably assess:

SOF-Validated Competency	What It Means for Employers and State Talent Systems
Decision quality under uncertainty	Operators make consequential decisions with incomplete information, manage cognitive bias in real time, and adjust quickly when reality shifts. This is portable, high-value capability across industries from strategy and operations to cybersecurity and public leadership.
Resilience as operational practice	SOF training develops procedural skills in emotional regulation, fatigue management, and sustained team trust during prolonged strain — not resilience as a personality trait, but as a trainable, observable competency.
Influence without authority	Special Operations culture centers on indirect leadership: advising, influencing, and aligning partners who do not report to them. These are the skills required in matrixed, cross-functional organizations where progress depends on alignment, not hierarchy.

SOF-Validated Competency	What It Means for Employers and State Talent Systems
Systems thinking and adaptive planning	Operators are trained in planning disciplines that emphasize environmental mapping, anticipating second- and third-order effects, and decentralized execution aligned to intent — rare and essential in volatile markets.
Selection-validated leadership	SOF attrition rates often exceed 60–80% among already high-performing service members. In industrial-organizational psychology, structured selection is one of the strongest predictors of performance. Operators arrive pre-validated for high-order competencies that most organizations struggle to measure reliably.

The challenge is that these competencies are largely invisible to current talent marketplace infrastructure. MOC's don't capture them. Automated translation tools cannot verify them. And for service members from classified career fields, the documentation problem is compounded by the fact that the most impressive work they did cannot be disclosed at all.

State talent marketplaces that build non-disclosure validation pathways, human-in-the-loop competency verification, and skills-based employer matching infrastructure are not just serving equity goals. They are building the capacity to connect employers with one of the highest-value talent pools available.



Section V: The Interstate Portability Imperative

Military-connected residents move. This is not an exception — it is the defining characteristic of military life. A service member on a three-year assignment brings their family to your state, contributes to your workforce and economy, and then moves to the next assignment. A military spouse establishes a professional career, earns credentials, and then finds that those credentials are not portable to the next state.

Skills-based systems are most effective when learning and employment records are portable across state, territorial, and Tribal boundaries. For military-connected residents, portability is not a nice-to-have — it is a prerequisite for inclusion.

The Powering Trust in Skills cohort — 33 states, territories, and Tribal governments, backed by Walmart and developed with C-BEN and NGA — offers an unprecedented vehicle for building the interstate portability infrastructure that military-connected residents need. States should use the cohort's governance and coordination structures to:

- Align to shared interoperability standards (W3C Verifiable Credentials, Open Badges 3.0, CTDL) so credentials verified in one state are readable and trusted in another.
- Develop cross-state recognition agreements for military-connected prior learning assessment decisions, so that credit recognized by one institution travels with the learner.
- Establish shared competency mapping frameworks for military-acquired skills that any cohort state can use — eliminating the need for each state to build this capacity independently.
- Coordinate with the National Guard Bureau, which operates across all 54 states, territories, and DC, to connect Guard members' military and civilian learning records in a portable, learner-controlled format.



Section VI: Illustrative State Scenarios

The following scenarios illustrate how state talent marketplace infrastructure choices affect real outcomes for military-connected residents. They are illustrative, not case studies, but grounded in the structural gaps described in this guide.

Scenario A: Retaining a Special Operations Veteran Already Living in Your State

A Special Forces Soldier has spent the past five years stationed at a military installation in your state. During twelve years of service, he has led sensitive operations, managed classified communications networks, and trained foreign military partners. Although much of his experience cannot be publicly disclosed, he has successfully completed one of the military's most rigorous selection and qualification pipelines and possesses highly sought-after leadership, cybersecurity, and operational planning capabilities.

As his separation date approaches, he faces a choice: remain in the state where he and his family have built a life, or relocate. Like thousands of transitioning service members each year, his decision will be shaped by whether he can clearly see civilian career opportunities that recognize the value of his military experience.

In a state without military-inclusive talent marketplace infrastructure, little coordination occurs before separation. His military learning records remain disconnected from state workforce systems, employers cannot interpret his Military Occupational Code (MOC) or classified experience, and applicant tracking systems filter him out before his capabilities are ever considered. Despite possessing highly validated skills, he struggles to identify career pathways that match his potential and ultimately leaves the state, taking years of federally funded training, leadership experience, and economic value with him.

In a state that has adopted the practices described in this guide, the transition begins well before his final day of military service. Through partnerships with installation transition offices, SkillBridge, TAP, and state workforce agencies, he is introduced to the state's talent marketplace while still on active duty. His Joint Services Transcript (JST) contributes verified learning to a learner-controlled Learning and Employment Record (LER), competency mapping aligns his military-acquired skills with the state's workforce framework, and trusted non-disclosure pathways recognize validated capabilities that cannot be publicly documented. Participating employers use skills-based job descriptions and talent marketplace tools to identify his qualifications based on demonstrated competencies rather than military job titles alone. Instead of searching for a place to start over, he sees a clear pathway to continue his career—and his life—in the state that has already benefited from his service.

Scenario B: The Military Spouse Re-Entering the Workforce

A military spouse has a master's degree in social work and three years of licensed clinical experience. Her family has moved four times in seven years. Each move required re-application for state licensure — a process that can take six to eighteen months and in some states requires additional supervised hours regardless of prior experience. Employment gaps accumulate. Earning potential resets.

In a state with military-inclusive portability infrastructure, her prior licensure and competency evidence travels with her in a portable LER. Reciprocity agreements with sending states allow expedited licensure review. Skills-based hiring practices by state employers evaluate her competency record rather than her employment timeline.

Scenario C: The National Guard Member Bridging Military and Civilian Careers

A National Guard staff sergeant works full-time as a logistics manager for a regional manufacturer and serves part-time with her unit. Her military training includes advanced logistics operations, supply chain management under field conditions, and equipment maintenance leadership. None of this appears in her civilian employer's HR system or in state workforce data.

In a state with integrated military-civilian LER infrastructure, her Guard training records connect to her LER alongside her civilian work history. Her employer has access to a skills-based framework to recognize her military logistics competencies in performance and promotion decisions. State workforce analytics can identify her as part of a pipeline for high-demand logistics roles.

Scenario D: The Returning Home Service Member

A service member from Alabama has spent eight years stationed in Texas and North Carolina. As separation approaches, she would like to return home to Alabama, where her family remains. But like many transitioning service members, her top priority is finding a high-quality civilian career. If the right opportunities aren't available in Alabama, she'll likely relocate to wherever the best job prospects exist.

She possesses military-acquired skills in cybersecurity, project management, and leadership, but has no direct connection to Alabama employers.

In a traditional workforce system, Alabama may never know she exists until she begins applying for jobs—or may never have the opportunity to connect with her at all if she accepts employment in another state. The state misses the chance to introduce her to employers, workforce programs, and career opportunities while she is still making decisions about where to live after military service.

In a state with military-inclusive talent marketplace infrastructure, Home of Record information and military transition partnerships enable her to establish a learner-controlled skills profile before separation. Her military learning records connect to Alabama's talent marketplace, allowing employers with cybersecurity vacancies to identify her skills and engage with her early in the transition process. Rather than hoping she returns after leaving active duty, Alabama can proactively demonstrate that it offers meaningful career opportunities—giving her a compelling reason to come home and helping the state retain a highly skilled future resident, employee, and taxpayer.



Section VII: Getting Started — Priority Actions for State Leaders

States at different stages of talent marketplace development will have different starting points. The following priority actions are sequenced for states beginning or deepening their military-connected inclusion work.

Priority	Action	Who Needs
1	Audit existing talent marketplace governance documents to determine whether military-connected populations are named as a priority. If not, add them explicitly.	Governor's Workforce Advisor / Talent Marketplace Lead
2	Inventory which military-earned credentials, Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES)-supported certifications, and military learning documented through the JST are represented within state credential and workforce systems. Identify and remediate gaps.	State Credential Registry Administrator / SHEEO
3	Assess whether the state's LER system has a pathway for integrating military learning records, including JST data. If not, add it to the next procurement or development cycle as a defined requirement.	State Workforce Agency CIO / LER Vendor Manager
4	Convene a working group with military installation education offices, the state National Guard and TAP coordinator, state workforce agencies, and technology partners to align on data-sharing and talent marketplace integration.	Governor's Office / Adjutant General
5	Review occupational licensure requirements in high-demand fields (healthcare, cybersecurity, logistics, emergency management) for military equivalency pathways. Publish a remediation plan.	State Licensing Boards / Governor's Workforce Council
6	Identify two or three Powering Trust in Skills cohort partners with significant military populations to pilot interstate portability agreements for military learning records, credentials, and verified skills data..	State Workforce Agency / Powering Trust Cohort Coordinator
7	Engage CFS x C-BEN and their partners to support military-acquired skills identification, validation, and alignment to competency frameworks, skills ontologies, and credential registries. Engage CFS x C-BEN to support state implementation of LERs, interoperability standards, and broader skills-based hiring and workforce ecosystem strategies.	State Talent Marketplace Lead / CFS x C-BEN Partnership Manager

Appendix A.

Existing Military Learning, Credentialing, and Workforce Infrastructure

The military-connected ecosystem already includes a wide range of programs, systems, and initiatives designed to document military learning, support credential attainment, facilitate workforce transitions, and connect service members to education and employment opportunities. While each was created to address a specific need, these programs collectively represent a significant foundation for participation in the emerging skills-based hiring ecosystem.

This appendix provides an overview of key military-connected programs, their current purpose and outputs, and opportunities to further leverage them in support of interoperable learning and employment records, skills-based hiring, credential portability, and workforce mobility. The intent is not to create new programs, but to help states, workforce agencies, education providers, and employers better understand how existing military infrastructure can be aligned, modernized, and integrated into broader talent marketplace systems.

The programs included below are national in scope and are not intended to represent a comprehensive inventory of resources available to military-connected populations. Many states have developed their own initiatives, partnerships, credentialing programs, apprenticeship pathways, military spouse supports, and workforce transition efforts. States should evaluate these recommendations in the context of their existing military-connected infrastructure and identify opportunities to align both state and federal resources in support of service members, veterans, National Guard and Reserve members, and military families..

Program	Current Purpose	Current Outputs	Future Opportunity
JST (Joint Services Transcript)	Documents military education, training, and experience for the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Coast Guard and supports academic credit evaluation.	Experience and training documentation, ACE credit recommendations.	Serve as an authoritative record of military learning that contributes to trusted workforce signals through evidence-based skills analysis, supporting Learning and Employment Records (LERs), portable workforce credentials, and skills-based hiring.
CCAF (Community College of the Air Force)	Documents Air Force and Space Force education, training, and experience while awarding accredited academic credentials that support professional development and academic progression.	Military learning records, academic transcript, degree records, and education and training documentation.	Serve as an authoritative record of military learning that contributes to trusted workforce signals through evidence-based skills analysis, supporting Learning and Employment Records (LERs), portable workforce credentials, and skills-based hiring.

Program	Current Purpose	Current Outputs	Future Opportunity
VMET (Verification of Military Experience and Training)	Provides a summary of military training and occupational experience for transitioning service members.	Experience and training documentation.	Contribute verified military experience data to evidence-based skills analysis, supporting trusted workforce signals, talent marketplaces, career navigation tools, and Learning and Employment Records (LERs).
TAP (Transition Assistance Program)	Prepares service members for civilian employment, education, and entrepreneurship.	Career readiness planning and transition services.	Serve as an entry point for creating learner-controlled skills profiles, workforce credentials, and connections to state workforce and education systems.
SkillBridge	Provides civilian work-based learning opportunities during military transition.	Employer-sponsored internships, fellowships, apprenticeships, and training experiences.	States can promote SkillBridge as a talent pipeline by helping approved SkillBridge employers connect with state workforce systems, talent marketplaces, and industry partnerships. States can also work with employers to identify funding models that support continued training, employment, or apprenticeship opportunities once the service member separates from active duty, helping retain skilled talent within the state.
USMAP (United Services Military Apprenticeship Program)	Documents military occupational experience for eligible Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve personnel and supports completion of Registered Apprenticeship requirements.	Work-process documentation and apprenticeship credentials.	States can integrate USMAP into apprenticeship, credentialing, and workforce development strategies by recognizing documented military work experience, reducing duplication of training, and creating accelerated pathways to civilian apprenticeships, industry credentials, and high-demand occupations.
COOL (Credentialing Opportunities Online) Programs	Connect eligible Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve personnel with civilian certifications and licenses aligned to their military occupation and career goals.	Credential attainment pathways and certification guidance.	States can leverage COOL programs to accelerate credential attainment for service members and veterans by increasing awareness of military-funded credentialing opportunities, aligning state licensure pathways with COOL-supported credentials, and recognizing military-earned certifications within workforce, education, and economic development initiatives.

Program	Current Purpose	Current Outputs	Future Opportunity
DANTES (Defense Activity for Education Support)	Supports educational advancement, testing, and credential attainment.	Certifications, examinations, and educational outcomes.	States can leverage DANTES-supported testing, credentialing, and educational programs to accelerate credential attainment, reduce barriers to employment, and connect military-connected individuals to high-demand career pathways
LERs (Learning and Employment Records)	Emerging infrastructure for learner-controlled records.	Structured records of education, training, skills, and credentials.	Leverage existing Learning and Employment Record (LER) implementations, such as the Department of War's MilGears LER, to integrate verified military learning records and military occupational analysis into workforce, education, and talent marketplace systems, enabling portable, learner-controlled records across state lines.



About CFS x C-BEN

The Center for Skills by C-BEN (CFS x C-BEN) is a national initiative of the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) that serves as a catalyst for building the consensus, infrastructure, and standards that connect learning to career success and economic opportunity. CFS x C-BEN works alongside states, territories, Tribal nations, employers, and education providers to design and govern skills-based talent systems that are transparent, equitable, and built to scale.

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For technical assistance on military-connected inclusion, contact CFS x C-BEN at centerforskills.org



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