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**VA Announces Winners in “Badges for Vets” Contest**

***Helps Vets Translate Skills into Jobs, Academic Credit***

WASHINGTON – A major university, the National Association of Manufacturers and an international software developer have been honored by the Department of Veterans Affairs for their contributions to a new digital badge program that will make it easier for Veterans to document the skills they learned in uniform for civilian employers and institutions of higher education.

“We strive to support the men and women who served in uniform as they make their transitions to good jobs and advanced education,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki, “Our Badges for Vets program will offer Veterans a handy tool to demonstrate their experience to employers and educators.”

“Badges recognize the skills that members of our military are learning in the field – making Veterans the real winners of this competition,” said Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. “These grantees will help to put Veterans on a fast track toward earning a degree or certificate and will let employers know they have workforce-ready skills.”

Last November, the VA Innovation Initiative (VAi2) announced a nation-wide competition to create digital “badges” to help Veterans translate their military skills into civilian jobs or to receive advance credit in higher education.

“The U.S. military offers some of the highest quality training available,” said Jonah Czerwinski, director of the VAi2 program, which administered the contest. “Badges for Vets will deliver a new return on our national investment in military training and experience.”

Finalists in the contest are:

* The Manufacturing Institute, an affiliate of the National Association of Manufacturers, which will incorporate badges in its online jobs-and-talent-matching platform.
* TopCoder, Inc., an international information technology consulting company, will issue badges representing military training and experience and use them to qualify a Veteran for a particular assignment.
* Western Governors University, a national, non-profit, university sponsored by 19 governors, will award academic transfer credit to Veterans who have earned digital badges representing corresponding military training.  The university’s initial focus will be in its IT and health care degree programs.

The finalists will now compete in the second phase of the contest to see which organization best implements its badges program by the end of May. VA will announce the final winner of the contest shortly after Memorial Day.

A digital “badge” recognizes skills obtained through learning outside traditional classrooms, such as work-related training and experience. Digital badge credentials are issued by organizations such as schools, universities, employers or trade associations. Badges can be displayed and validated electronically on the Web or presented on a resume. Like any credential or academic credit, a digital badge can lead to a job or advanced academic standing.

VA was joined by the Departments of Education, Energy, and Labor to sponsor the contest. The Badges for Vets contest is part of the Badges for Lifelong Learning Competition administered by a consortium supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and Mozilla Foundation.

VAi2 taps the talent and expertise of individuals both inside and outside government by funding new, innovative solutions that increase Veterans’ access to VA services, improve the quality of services delivered, enhance the performance of VA operations, and reduce or control the cost of delivering those services that Veterans and their families receive.

Information about the Badges for Lifelong Learning Competition:

<http://www.dmlcompetition.net/>

<http://challenge.gov/VAi2/262-badges-for-vets>

Information about the VA Innovations Initiative:

[www.va.gov/vai2/](http://www.va.gov/vai2/)

Websites of the winners:

[www.themanufacturinginstitute.org](http://www.themanufacturinginstitute.org)

<https://usmanufacturingpipeline.com/>

<http://www.topcoder.com/>

<http://www.wgu.edu/>

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