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VA Announces Expansion of Veterans Economic Communities Initiative

25 Communities Added to Program that Expands Education and Employment Opportunities for Veterans

COSTA MESA, CA – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced the expansion of a program aimed at increasing education and employment opportunities to America's Veterans to an additional 25 new communities. The Veterans Economic Communities Initiative (VECI) brings together local and national partners to coordinate services for Veterans, Servicemembers and military families.

Announcement of the expanded communities was made in Costa Mesa by senior VA officials to more than 500 leaders from the business, nonprofit, philanthropic and local government communities who are attending VA's two-day inaugural VECI Policy Academy, which began September 29. The Policy Academy serves as a forum for local, regional and national partner organizations to engage in honest dialog about Veteran economic issues; receive interactive training on national philanthropic and community-based best practices; and hear from leaders in the field about emerging data, trends and opportunities.

"History has shown that when you give Veterans an opportunity to succeed, they go above and beyond. And we as a nation owe them those opportunities to succeed," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald. "There is a tremendous amount of goodwill from the American people towards Veterans; they want to help. Through public-private partnerships like those formed and harnessed by VA's Economic Communities Initiative, we will now be able to provide better networks and tools to Veterans in 50 communities nationwide."

Secretary McDonald [launched](#) the VECI campaign in May 2015 to promote local collaboration, dialog and partnership among organizations that serve transitioning Servicemembers, Veterans and their families. VECI is part of Secretary McDonald's department-wide transformation called MyVA, which is dedicated to putting Veterans at the center of everything VA does and enhancing strategic partnerships to extend VA's reach of services.

"We have made great strides in how Veterans and their families are being supported at the local and national level through the first 25 communities that launched this incredible initiative," said Rosye Cloud, Senior Advisor for Veteran Employment during the opening session of the Policy Academy. "It is because of the success of the partnerships formed through VECI that we are able to double the program from 25 to 50 communities participating. And we are excited that this announcement was made at our first-ever VECI Policy Academy."

As part of the VECI initiative, a VA economic liaison in each community will expand and encourage collaboration among private and public organizations that offer resources related to Veteran education, training and employment. Through strategic partnerships, and by offering Veterans innovative forms of learning and employment opportunities, these communities will help Veterans gain competitive career skills and knowledge in locally in-demand fields.

Campaign partners include the Departments of Defense and Labor, the Small Business Administration, and regional and national nonprofits, businesses and educators. All VECI communities were selected based on the size of transitioning Servicemember and Post-9/11 Veteran populations; unemployment, employment opportunity and job growth; and education spending.

The full list of VECI communities is provided below. New communities being launched in early 2016 are denoted with an asterisk, and do not yet have an economic liaison assigned to their location:

Atlanta, GA	Clarksville, TN*	El Paso, TX	Las Vegas, NV	Norfolk, VA	Sacramento, CA*
Augusta, GA	Cleveland, OH*	Fayetteville, NC*	Los Angeles, CA	Oklahoma City, OK*	San Antonio, TX
Austin, TX*	Colorado Springs, CO	Fort Walton Beach, FL	Louisville, KY	Orlando, FL*	San Diego, CA
Baltimore, MD*	Columbia, SC*	Honolulu, HI	Memphis, TN*	Philadelphia, PA*	San Francisco, CA*
Boise, ID*	Columbus, OH*	Houston, TX	Miami, FL	Phoenix, AZ	Seattle, WA

Boston, MA*	Dallas, TX	Indianapolis, IN*	Milwaukee, WI*	Pittsburgh, PA*	St. Louis, MO
Buffalo, NY	Denver, CO*	Jacksonville, FL	Minneapolis, MN*	Portland, OR*	Tampa, FL*
Charlotte, NC*	Detroit, MI*	Kansas City, MO	Nashville, TN	Richmond, VA	Washington, DC
Chicago, IL	Cincinnati, OH	Killeen, TX*	New York, NY	Riverside, CA	

Under the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative, communities will develop scalable, sustainable models in the next two years that will include:

- Developing ongoing public-private partnerships focused on employment and economic opportunities;
- Fostering employer networking and encouraging hiring commitments on the Veterans Employment Center™ (www.ebenefits.va.gov/jobs);
- Supporting events such as career fairs, job and employment summits, and roundtables to boost economic competitiveness for Veterans;
- Sharing best practices and training and supporting employers who are considering hiring Veterans; and
- Facilitating the development of learning or resource hubs to help connect Veterans to economic opportunities including entrepreneurship, credentialing and skills building.

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