

Veterans and the Labor Market

Creating connections for successful employment (Part 1)

Successful employment placement requires having two audiences: Veteran clients and local employers. Your local community partners can serve as the connection point between these two audiences using publically available, free or low-cost tools and resources.

Step One: Identify Employment Needs

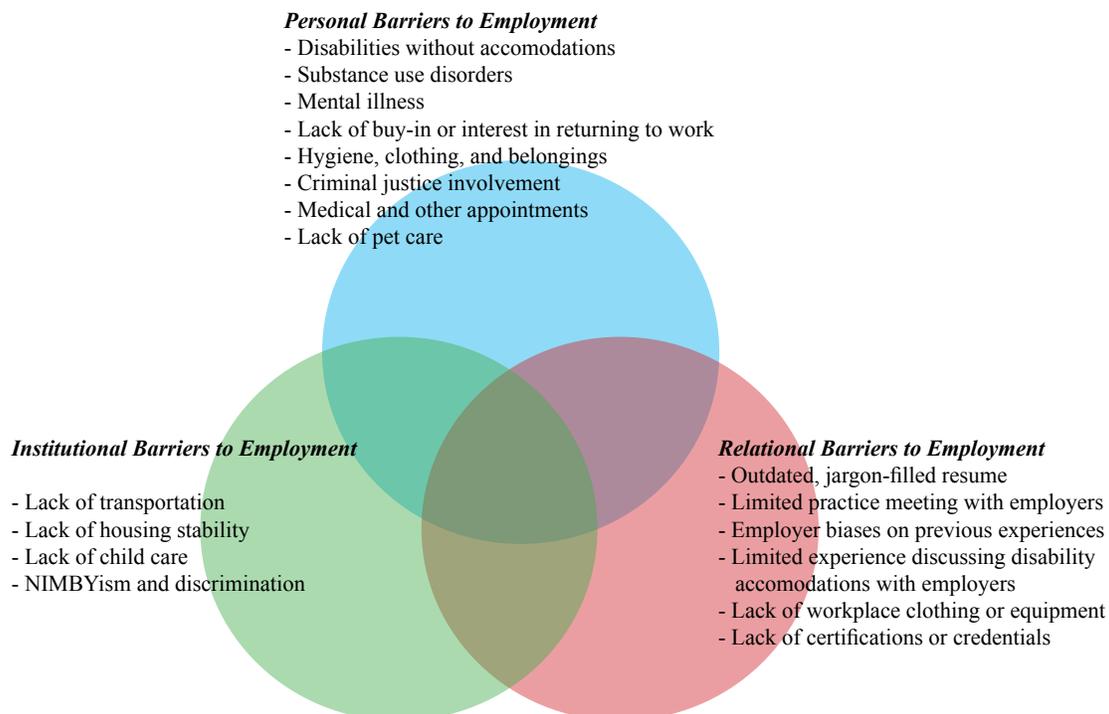
Some SSVF programs have designated employment staff members who can help Veterans with these steps. Others will need to rely on local partners to provide employment services. Your primary focus is to help Veterans obtain and maintain housing. Your community partners, like the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) or the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPS) at the American Job Center, can likely help with the vocational assessment, goal setting and plan development, and updating process. They can help you get to know the employment needs of the Veterans enrolled in both systems by conducting a vocational assessment, setting clear employment goals, and developing an initial joint employment plan that is updated regularly as goals are met. Throughout this process, using strengths-based, motivational interviewing interventions will improve the quality of engagement with the Veteran. Leverage your local partnerships to support this effort. The information that follows gives you an insight into some of the resources, tools, and methods commonly used to help Veterans experiencing homelessness return to work.

Veterans served by SSVF face several significant barriers that can make a return to work difficult. Having a productive conversation with a Veteran about employment often starts with unpacking the Veteran's barriers to employment. As an employment specialist works through the assessment process, they can make note of the employment barriers faced by Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

These barriers fall into three broad categories:

- **personal barriers** that relate to the individual himself or herself that make return to work more challenging;
- **institutional barriers** that are systemic challenges impairing the individual's ability to return to work; and
- **relational barriers** that involve how the individual Veteran communicates with his or her employment environment.

Here is a look at some common barriers in these categories:



Each of these sets of barriers requires a different case management approach.

Individual or personal barriers can be addressed with the Veteran in the safety of the case management relationship. For example, a discussion on personal hygiene can happen once the employment specialist has established a trust relationship with the Veteran.

Relational barriers can be addressed by the employment specialist at your partner agency skilled in overcoming these specific challenges. For example, MyNextMove - an online tool to translate military skills into civilian careers - can help the employment specialist and the Veteran translate a jargon-filled resume into a relevant resume for civilian positions.

Institutional barriers can encumber a Veteran's job search. For example, a Veteran with a felony conviction may encounter challenges applying for positions that require a background check before the interview, but that same Veteran can be successful obtaining an interview with a company that hires otherwise qualified individuals irrespective of criminal history or that does not ask about felony convictions on applications by "banning the box". Knowing this information about the Veteran will help gauge the next steps in the employment search. Sometimes, you can even work together to delete institutional barriers. For example, a Veteran may be staying at a shelter that is far away from public transportation; as he or she works with SSVF to obtain housing, the case manager can focus on apartments on or near public transportation resources.

Engaging a Veteran in the employment search starts with smart planning. Several tools are available to facilitate a meaningful vocational assessment, and your partners at HVRP agencies or the AJC can fill this role. Some agencies may already have access to extensive, formal vocational assessment tools and inventories. These inventories may test interests, intelligence, personality, achievement, and aptitude. However, many useful assessment tools for conducting a meaningful vocational assessment are free and easily accessible. Two no-cost options include the **consumer interview** and the **O*NET Interest Profiler** available through MyNextMove.

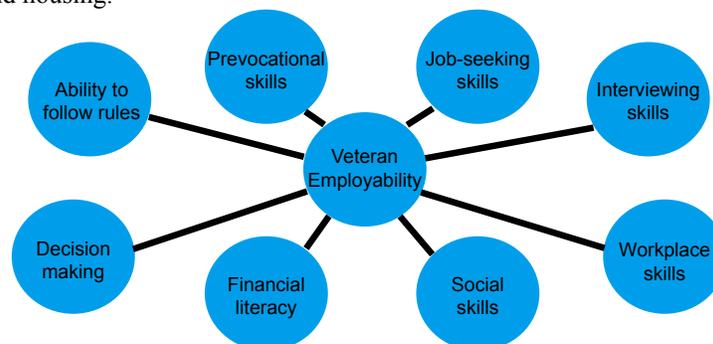
The consumer interview is a guided interview focused on gathering data necessary to facilitate next steps, build confidence, and effectively communicate the collaborative nature of the goal-setting process. Each agency likely uses a slightly different interview format, but all consumer interviews should accomplish these five goals¹:

- Create an environment of rapport between the case manager and the Veteran
- Explain important information about the agency and the services to be provided
- Identify the Veteran's workplace strengths and barriers to employability
- Build the Veteran's confidence in the process and in his or her employability
- Provide the case manager with needed information to steer goal setting

Here are a few questions the employment specialist will likely ask before they get started²:

- What are the goals of this assessment process?
- What information will I and the Veteran need to accomplish these goals?
- Will the Veteran react or be impacted by any of the questions I am going to ask?
- Do I have access to any additional information already gathered about the Veteran so I can avoid asking duplicate questions?

The map below gives you an introduction to the core components of the Veteran's employability. This skills-based approach to interviewing can show the Veteran that weaknesses in one area may be balanced by strengths in others. Additionally, these components can serve as the foundation for an employment plan. This map outlines the Veteran's training and case management needs related to employment. The employment specialist can then look at the skill gaps to see how the SSVF's expertise, resources, and partnerships can fill in those gaps to support employability. Note that this is an ongoing process that can and should happen before, during, and after the Veteran achieves employment and housing.



¹Adapted from Farley, R.C. and Rubin, S.E. (1982) The intake interview. In R.T. Roessler & S.E. Rubin (Eds.) Case management and rehabilitation counseling: Procedures and techniques. Baltimore: University Park Press.

²Adapted from Seligman, L. (1994) Developmental Career Counseling and Assessment. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing

³Adapted from Rollnick, S. & Miller, W. (2008). Motivational Interviewing in Health Care: Helping Patients Change Behavior. New York: The Guilford Press