



OVERVIEW: JOINING FORCES FOR WOMEN VETERANS AND MILITARY SPOUSES MENTORING PLUS

www.womenjoiningforces.org

Beginning in 2005, Business and Professional Women's (BPW) Foundation made a commitment to better understand the employment transition of women veterans, fielding research among 1600 women veterans of all eras. The results highlighted translation and portability of skills as major obstacles and underscored an overwhelming gap in career and employment support among the growing population of military women upon their return to civilian life.

Armed with this learning, BPW Foundation initiated studies and engaged private and public sector partners to outline employment access strategies, culminating in October 2010 with the inaugural **Joining Forces for Women Veterans National Summit**. More than 75 leaders from private sector businesses, local and national government agencies, and non profit organizations joined with women veterans for a full-day's discussion of reintegration issues, employment, and homelessness.

BPW Foundation's **Joining Forces for Women Veterans and Military Spouses Mentoring Plus (JFWVMSMP)** was conceived and developed following this conference to address the critical ongoing need for informed, committed mentors to position and educate women veterans as they search for new employment, hone their career goals, and package their military skills and experience to gain access to civilian jobs. First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden recognized this "mentorship gap" in their selection of BPW Foundation to implement a large-scale mentoring initiative to benefit women veterans and military wives within the White House's national Joining Forces effort.

During 2011, BPW Foundation, in partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the **Women Joining Forces and Joining Forces Mentoring Advisory Councils**, completed the research to assemble the **Joining Forces for Women Veterans and Military Spouses Mentoring Plus** framework. This landmark program will launch in January 2012 to help thousands of women veterans and military wives by connecting them with volunteer working women mentors over a sustained period of time. With grass roots capacity to position and guide women veterans in their job searches and career development, we will initially pair 10,000 mentees with mentors. Ultimately, we will engage partners toward a widening target of 100,000 mentorships, recognizing that more than 150,000 women are projected to leave the military over the next five years and join the over 1.8 million existing women veterans.

Building the Program:

Developing the Architecture

Workforce research reinforces the fundamental value mentor relationships can make for women veterans in transition and the measurable impact of one-on-one coaching. **Joining Forces for Women Veterans and Military Spouses Mentoring Plus** will engage and train women mentors from the pipeline of our base (50,000), legacy network (10,000), as well as partner employee bases and women coalition groups. These volunteers will tap their own experiences in the workplace to guide and empower veterans and military wives.

Veteran and civilian mentors of all ages, across all geography, will provide insight, advice, and encouragement to help women veterans and military wives steer an individualized course of action in the civilian workplace. The **JFWVMSMP** structure will enable mentors and mentees to work together to design and develop the goals and benchmarks for mentee employment plans. A cadre of online resources and subject matter experts will assist mentees in areas that challenge workplace attainment, adjustment, retention, and/or supplier chain participation.

The Business Case for Joining JFWVMSMP

BPW Foundation is enlisting employer stakeholders to support, engage, and train women employees and business women as mentors and subject matter experts. Corporate stakeholders will provide access to job and supplier chain opportunities for qualified unemployed and/or underemployed mentees, using the mentoring program as a pipeline to motivated and dedicated employees and suppliers.

Along with workforce development, employer partners will find the program augments talent development and acquisition, diversity and inclusion, corporate employee voluntarism and social responsibility, and related customer loyalty benefits. Individual company mentor/mentee program participation models will guide development of expanded **JFWVMSMP** efforts, as initial goals are reached and the framework is broadened.

Building Tools and Resources

BPW Foundation is engaging program partners from private and nonprofit sectors to support deployment of **JFWVMSMP** and add to the program's pipeline of mentors and subject matter experts as we cull content, provide mentoring resources and expertise, connect mentors with mentees, and provide job opportunities to mentees. We will offer online and direct contact resources at several levels to provide tailored, individualized services for women veterans and military wife mentees. These include the following:

- A 10-point matching system for mentors and mentees, including such areas as specific industry interests, veteran benefits, job readiness, and career transition needs
- An individual development plan "contract" between each mentee and her mentor outlining employment and career goals, with benchmarks and action steps
- In depth, user-friendly training and content for mentors, mentees, and employers
- Subject matter experts who can be tapped for individual consultation and guidance on a wide range of issues, ranging from work-life balance and negotiation skills to industry careers and entrepreneurship
- Access to most extensive job boards, as well as industry training and credentialing systems
- Portal access to entrepreneurship resources including assessments, training, and support
- Analytic information about mentors, mentees, employers, and their experiences—as well as outcomes and goal attainment—for use in evaluative research and program development

Building Capacity through Partnerships:

The website's structure reinforces this program as part of the continuum of workforce development, preparing and encouraging current and potential employees to take on increasingly active and substantial roles in the workplace. To augment efficiency, BPW Foundation will continue to identify organizations with expertise in mentorship, veterans' benefits, social networking, and other identified career skills to make their materials available through the website.

In addition, BPW Foundation will look for opportunities to partner with communities launching and assessing holistic reintegration strategies for women veterans and military wives. These include connections to benefits, services, and mentors by utilizing local employers, community colleges, adult education programs, and housing systems, as well as community-based and women-focused organizations.

Evaluating JFWVMSMP:

Success will be measured by tracking the successful transition and reintegration of women veterans and military wives through a woman-helping-woman model to generate 100,000 mentor relationships nationally. Mentor/mentee success will be gauged by factors including number, quality, and relationship outcomes, with key barometers such as progress in attaining and advancing employment and reaching personal and family goals.

If you have questions or would like further information, please contact: Karen Montagne at 202-777-8972 or kmontagne@bpwfoundation.org. We welcome corporate, foundation, and agency support and partnerships.