

4. Implications

As a research and education institution, BPW Foundation traditionally focuses on providing action-oriented research that clarifies the role of workingwomen in society as well as the challenges they face to full engagement in the workplace. BPW Foundation will often highlight ideas and opportunities ripe for change or adoption or provides insights that can help refine programs meant to support workingwomen.

In this pursuit, BPW Foundation often undertakes exploratory projects to emphasize and promote areas for further research and development by nonprofit, academic or government agencies. The initial *Women Veterans in Transition* survey as well as upcoming focus groups and interviews with women veterans and their employers has

been undertaken as a first step to determine whether further research is warranted with a larger and more representative sample—a very costly project. Upon review, BPW Foundation believes that even the initial findings of this report support an expanded study of the transition experiences of women and men veterans as they separate from the military and enter the civilian labor force and as they adjust to the civilian workforce.

Several of the findings emerging from the pilot study show sufficiently large effects on attitudes or outcomes that even in a more representative sample, it is likely that these findings, even if at a modified level—such as the time it takes to feel adjusted within the civilian workforce—will be confirmed.

The *Women Veterans in Transition Report* offers the clearest picture to date of the experiences of women veterans transitioning between the military and civilian worlds. BPW Foundation asserts that further research and program development are warranted and those interested in supporting women veterans in their career transitions are encouraged to explore the following areas:

For Researchers:

- Create public/private partnerships to conduct research to understand the circumstances and experiences of women and men veterans especially as it relates to their transition back into the civilian labor force.
- Collect and publish success stories and lessons learned at both the organizational and individual level on how to support successful career transitions and adjustment.
- Explore further the potential impact of reassuming the caregiver role on women veterans as they transition.
- Explore the nature of the disabilities experienced by women veterans and how they impact the career transition and adjustment experience.

For Decision Makers:

- Offer transition supports to women veterans over a broader time frame to enable women veterans with differing priorities and objectives to benefit. For example, 31 percent of women veterans who had reported that they had not secured a job since leaving the military also said that part of the reason for their delay was that they were thinking about what to do next.
- Explore opportunities to provide a respite/transition period for women veterans as they separate from the military before they must re-enter the civilian workforce. This may be a challenge as more than half of women veterans surveyed by BPW Foundation named themselves as the primary income earners of their families.
- Support efforts to increase the participation of women veterans in the Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops and Disability TAP prior to leaving the military.¹³
- Understand that while what distinguishes women veteran from other workingwomen are the issues unique to their transition out of the military and their military experiences, similar to other workingwomen they must also

“The camaraderie is not the same and people really don’t understand that.”

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

¹³ Trowell-Harris, Irene. (E-mail October 12, 2007) , Director, Center for Women Veterans. According to Dr. Trowell-Harris, a DoD Command Support Memorandum signed on August 24, 2007 by Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, the Honorable Michael L. Dominguez, encourages at least 85 percent participation of all veterans in TAP programs, which is a strong first step in achieving this goal.

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contend with challenges associated with balancing work and care giving roles, convincing employers of the value of their skills and shouldering a substantial share of the financial responsibilities for their families. Therefore, services that enable women veterans to contend with challenges in the workplace may also be applicable to the greater population of workingwomen.

- Expand efforts by organizations and employers who want to work with former members of the military to help women identify themselves as veterans. Women veterans tend to not identify themselves as veterans and this may undermine their tendency to access the benefits and services available to them.¹⁴
- Help women veterans understand the importance of the skills they bring to the civilian workplace.

For Service Organizations/Employers:

- Encourage the development or expansion of mentoring programs for and between women veterans (either informal mentoring or formal mentoring programs).
- Tap into existing diversity initiatives with organizations to support this unique population.
- Explore what is not working for women veterans at job fairs and then tailor job fairs to be more of what women want/perceive as useful.
- Combine or promote resources shown to be helpful to job searchers with resources that are used by women veterans; for example, providing online mentoring or chat rooms or webinars on job search skills.
- Make an effort to proactively work with the potential employers of women veterans. These employers need to be helped to understand and appreciate what women veterans have to offer, and how to take advantage of their valuable skill sets and leadership abilities.
- Urge employers to proactively advertise themselves as women-veteran friendly workplace and to ensure that structures and workplace cultures support this assertion.
- Encourage and expand upon the leadership abilities of women veterans within the civilian workforce by bettering integrating them into existing leadership training within employers and through organizations as well as explore the development of specialized tracks.
- Encourage women service members to begin their transitions before they separate from the military and help them appreciate the benefits of taking more time to find the right job.
- Encourage women veterans to explore the opportunities offered in the public service sector. Likewise, government agencies and nonprofit organizations need to become more aware of the how well women veterans fit with their culture, the skills they have to offer, and how to better recruit women veterans.
- Stress the importance of networking to women veterans in transition and strongly encourage them to join veterans' service organizations and professional organizations to access crucial health care, job, family, education and financial information. Link the building of social, business networks to "mission-oriented" activities that women veterans relate to their job search.
- Develop a strong collaboration between social and business organizations to support DoD, the VA and the Department of Labor as they educate women veterans about veteran benefits and services.

BPW Foundation will be publishing a "Top Ten Ways to Support Women Veterans in Transition" list in time for Veterans Day 2007. Visit www.bpwfoundation.org on Veterans Day, November 12, 2007, to download this informative document.

¹⁴ "Bill Designed to Inform/Increase Recipients" (October 2, 2007). Retrieved October 2007 from <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,151353,00.html>. Currently, the VA is NOT allowed, by law, to advertise benefits and services in the national media. Recently, U.S. Representative John Boozman, (R-AR), the ranking Republican on the Veterans Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, introduced bipartisan legislation (The Veterans Benefits Awareness Act of 2007) that would authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to purchase advertising in national media outlets to promote awareness of benefits that are available to veterans and their dependents.