Washington State

Veterans Recruitment Program (Preliminary Proposal)

Report to the Legislature

As required by Senate Bill 5849
(Chapter 192, Laws of 2017)

Office of Financial Management
State Human Resources
January 2018

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Executive summary

In 2017, the Washington State Legislature passed Senate Bill 5849 (Chapter 192, Laws of 2017), which states:

(1) The office shall develop a recruitment program that targets veterans and gives them credit for their knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities. In developing the program, the office shall consult with the department of enterprise services, department of veteran affairs, the state military transition council, the veterans employee resource group, and other interested stakeholders. Program development must include, but is not limited to, identifying: (a)Public and private military recruitment programs and ways those programs can be used in Washington; (b) similar military and state job classes and develop a system to provide veterans with experience credit for similar work; and (c) barriers to state employment and opportunities to better utilize veterans experience.
(2) The office shall report to the legislature with a draft plan by January 1, 2018, that includes draft bill language if necessary.

Underpinning this law was a concern over the number of veterans in the state workforce and their declining numbers. The percentage of veterans in the executive branch workforce (8.9 percent) remains higher than the availability of the population of veterans in Washington state (7.6 percent).[1] However, the hire rate for veterans has declined over the past three fiscal years from 8 percent in fiscal year 2014 to 6.5 percent in fiscal year 2017.[2] Compared to the rest of the executive branch, veterans in the state workforce have a higher than average retirement rate and a higher average age. The higher retirement rate for veterans, coupled with the higher average age, suggests that the percentage of veterans in our workforce will continue to decrease over the next several years.

To reverse this trend and in response to the enacted legislation, OFM State Human Resources contacted Amazon and Starbucks Corporation to learn more about their veteran recruitment processes. Both organizations have made investments in their military recruitment programs, including the expansion of these programs to include spouses. From both companies, OFM learned that about half the skills needed to successfully work for them were already part of a veteran's portfolio, and that the other half could be learned through on-the-job training. We also learned that the key to the successful recruiting, hiring and retention of veterans as employees was the use by these companies of teams whose members were familiar with military culture and whose main purpose was to find qualified applicants.

With respect to the charge to develop a veterans recruitment program, four options are provided for consideration:

- Option 1 is a continuation of the current level of services.
- Option 2 enhances current services through the addition of two dedicated enterprise-level veteran recruitment resources. This option would include developing a state-specific military translation crosswalk, creating an enterprise-wide military culture training and implementing agency mentorship programs.
- Option 3 is an all-encompassing plan. It includes the components from options 1 and 2, plus the creation of a veteran recruitment team. This team would reinstitute an enterprise-level veterans fellowship program and create a veteran recruitment team to provide additional coordination and support. This option would require four additional employees.

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[1] This percentage does not include higher education institutions, which do not use HRMS. Population data from the American Community Survey 2013-2015. Data accessed from Public Use Microdata Sample includes all veterans age 16 and older.
[2] HRMS

- Option 4 asks for one more year to conduct a more thorough analysis of other organizations' military recruitment programs and identification of additional strategies and resources needed to bridge the transitional gaps from military service to state service. This is the option that OFM recommends to ensure a comprehensive, thoughtful and data-driven system to improve the recruitment and retention of veterans in the state workforce.

Background

Washington state government is fully committed to successfully recruiting and retaining talented and skilled veterans in the state workforce. We recognize the value of extensive training, experience, leadership and transferrable skills gained through military service while also acknowledging the challenges associated with implementing a successful recruitment and onboarding process.

The Office of Financial Management State Human Resources Division (State HR), in collaboration with the Department of Enterprise Services, employed a planning and strategy specialist and a recruiting/technology consultant who reviewed veteran recruitment strategies during fiscal year 2013. Many of the strategies they helped develop were introduced at the enterprise, or statewide, level and State HR and DES partnered with agencies to recruit veterans through a collaborative effort. During this time, the new veteran hiring number increased 1.4 percent. For this effort, Washington won the National Association of State Personnel Executives' Eugene H. Rooney, Jr. award for innovative programs.

By 2015, however, State HR and DES could no longer sustain these two positions, and recruitment efforts declined. The number of veterans hired then dropped by 1 percent in 2015 and continues to decrease. (An examination is provided in the Enterprise Veteran Analysis section of this plan.) Without dedicated resources at the enterprise level to guide work, targeted efforts are not possible as most agencies do not have sufficient resources of their own.

This is a crucial point as we have found that we are more successful in recruiting and retaining veterans as employees if we approach these tasks at the enterprise level, not the individual agency level. At the enterprise level, we can display in one location the array of state jobs available, who to contact about those jobs and how to ask for more information about those jobs. It's common sense: A one-stop shop is far more convenient, and more likely to be used, by a customer than a collection of individual shops.

It is also important to note the Department of Defense has moved from downsizing the military to retaining and growing its personnel numbers. The Army will increase its force by 17,000 soldiers, the Air Force by 4,000 and the Marine Corps by 3,000 by 2018. With this shift in federal policy, the state of Washington will need to be even more competitive with the private sector to attract and keep veteran hires.

In 2017, the Washington State Legislature passed Senate Bill 5849 (Chapter 192, Laws of 2017), and the Governor signed it into law on May 4. It directed OFM to develop a recruitment program for veterans that provides credit for knowledge, skills and leadership abilities. In response, OFM established a work group composed of representatives from the Governor's Office, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington State Military Transition Council, DES, Department of Licensing, Employment Security Department's YesVets, Washington Student Achievement Council and the state's Veterans Employment Resource Group.

Private sector outreach

OFM is also required to reach out to private sector organizations to learn more about their veteran recruitment processes. We contacted Amazon and Starbucks Corporation to gain an overview of their military recruitment programs and ascertain if there were best practices we could replicate. This outreach included determining the resources we would need and the time, energy and cost of using those resources. We saw that the key to both companies' success is having military recruitment programs with dedicated staff, along with comprehensive resources and meaningful support at all leadership levels.

Amazon

Amazon has invested in several veteran recruitment programs with national outreach. It has identified its business needs and where military skill sets intersect with functional areas. This process is undertaken by its military recruitment teams, which are staffed by veterans who understand military skill sets and rank structures. In their work, these teams found that veterans already possess 50 percent of the skill sets needed to work in the operations side of Amazon's business. The other half is Amazon-centric technical skills, which are easily mastered through training.

A military recruitment program team comprises members from three functional areas: operations management and specialty paths; high-volume hiring; and Amazon web services. All three functional area teams, in turn, have dedicated regional military recruitment teams, each of which is composed of approximately 20 staff.

Amazon offers apprenticeship opportunities and a military leaders program for emerging IT specialists and operations managers. Amazon has also created an employee resource group, Amazon Warriors, to develop veterans to deliver exceptional results at Amazon, enable Amazon to make the best use of veteran talent and give back to communities through volunteer efforts.

Starbucks

Starbucks has invested in several strategies to scale hiring across the country, with a 2018 goal of hiring 10,000 veterans and spouses. So far, it has placed 5,500 veterans and spouses in its workforce. The company has created a field guide for hiring managers on engaging the military community. The resource covers topics ranging from Military 101 to hiring and onboarding veterans.

Starbucks has hired four military recruiters in targeted cities across the country. These individuals have made more than 80 connections with military bases, and installation transition and educational offices, both in the United States and overseas. Company staff have attended more than 200 military hiring events across the nation, reaching out to separating service members and their spouses. It has also expanded its employee resource group, Starbucks Armed Forces Network, from one to 12 regional chapters. These groups connect veterans outside Starbucks with job opportunities and veterans inside Starbucks to each other, thus creating a mentorship pipeline across the company to ease transition from military to civilian life.

Both companies understand the value of military skill sets, which can be readily transferred to employment they offer. They do not screen out veteran applicants due to a lack of technical skill sets, recognizing that these can easily be taught. Both companies have built a culture that supports hiring managers and military recruiters to work closely throughout the recruitment and onboarding process. Both have expanded their veteran recruitment programs to include spouses and family members.

Enterprise veteran analysis

State HR reports veteran data annually in the Human Resources Management Report. The following analysis comes from the 2017 report.

Chart 1 shows that the percentage of veterans in the executive branch workforce (8.9 percent) remains higher than the availability of the population of veterans in Washington state (7.6 percent).[3] The percentage of post-Vietnam-era veterans (7.2 percent) is also higher than the availability of the state's population (5.6 percent). The availability of only Vietnam-era veterans (1.6 percent) is slightly below that of the entire population (2.0 percent).

Chart 1
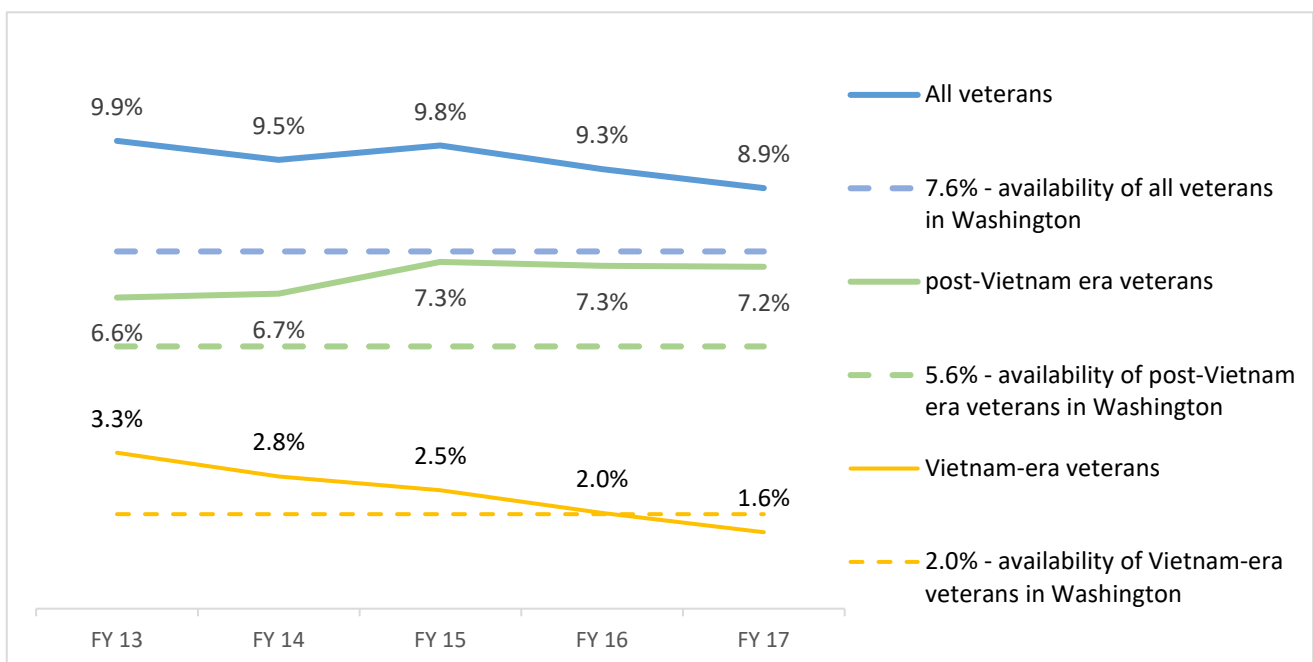## Percentage of veterans in executive branch workforce

Chart 2 shows veteran hires by functional area. Transportation, human services and general government functional areas employ 91 percent of the state's veterans (5,089), while the natural resources and education functional areas hire just 9 percent (527).[4] This is not surprising, given that the state's largest agencies are the Department of Social and Health Services and the Department of Transportation. It is not surprising, too, that the three top functional areas for veteran hiring are transportation, human services and general government as these functional areas parallel military jobs throughout all branches of service.

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[3] This percentage does not include higher education institutions, which do not use HRMS. Population data from the American Community Survey 2013-2015. Data accessed from Public Use Microdata Sample includes all veterans age 16 and older.

[4] Executive branch percentages from HRMS. Availability rates come from the American Community Survey Data 2013-2015. Data accessed from American Community Service Public Use Microdata Sample includes all veterans age 16 and older. Functional groups come from Office of Financial Management's Statewide Administrative and Accounting Manual, which groups all employees in each executive branch agency into five functional groups.
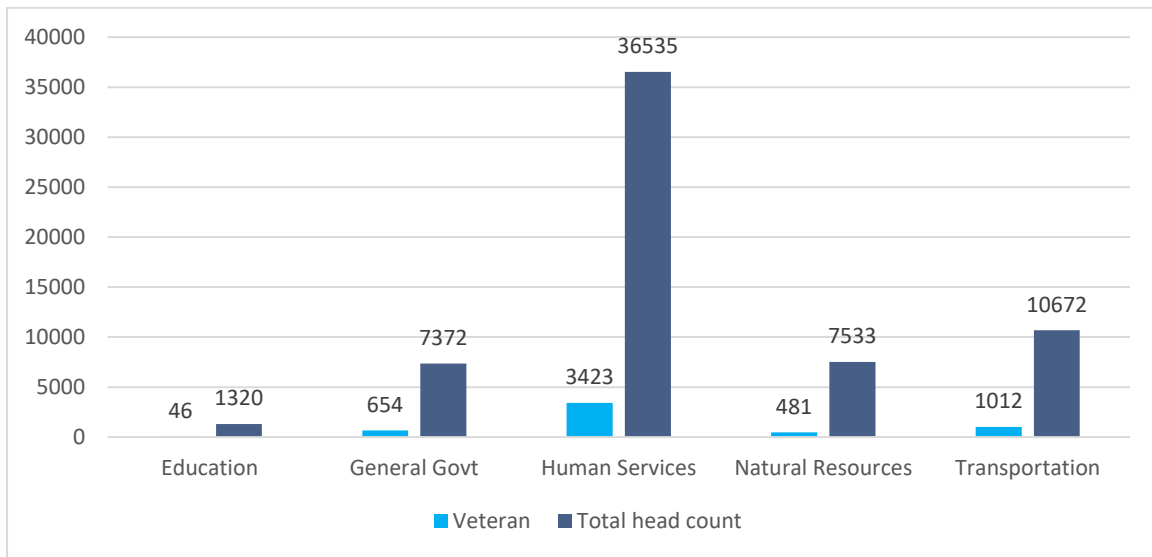
Chart 2
Veteran hires by functional area

Chart 3 shows that the hire rate for veterans has declined over the past three fiscal years. The rate in fiscal year 2017 was 6.5 percent, which is 1.5 percentage points lower than the high of 8 percent in fiscal year 2014. The five-year average hire rate for veterans is 7 percent.[5]
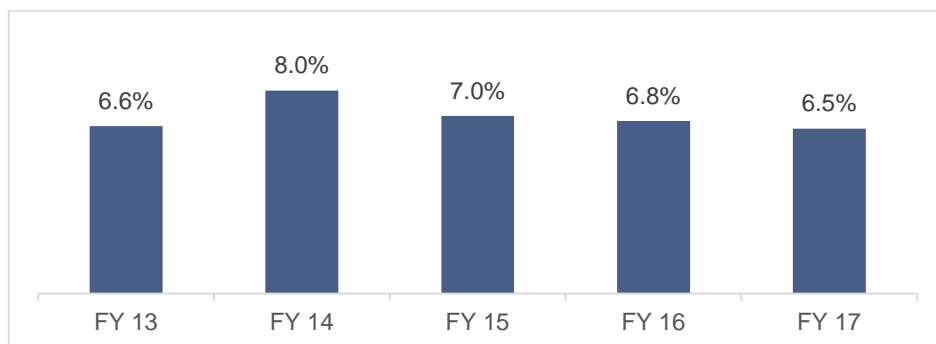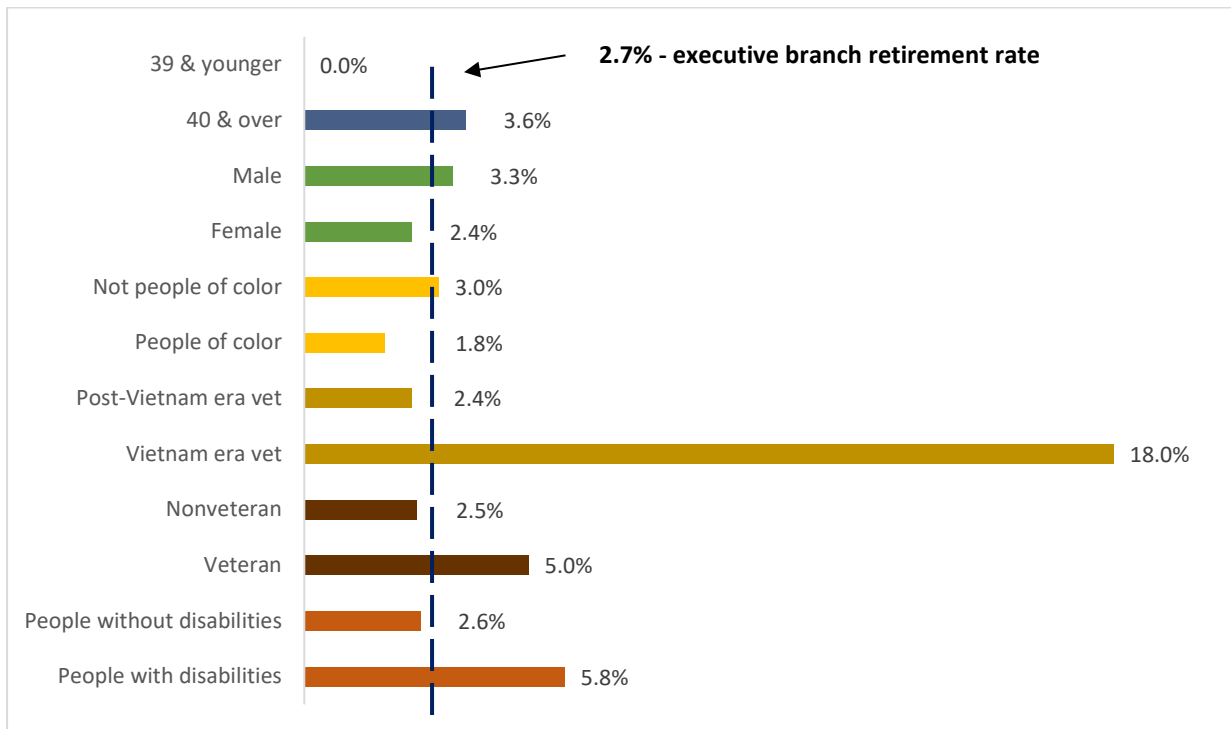
Chart 3
Veteran hire rate

Chart 4 compares retirement rates in fiscal year 2017 by demographic group in the executive branch workforce. The veteran retirement rate of 5 percent is twice that of the nonveteran retirement rate of 2.5 percent. Of the veterans retiring, the Vietnam-era retirement rate is 18 percent while the post-Vietnam-era retirement rate is 2.4 percent.[5] This is not surprising because the average age of Vietnam-era veterans is 64, which is also the average retirement age of the executive branch workforce. The average age of all veterans is 54 years (this is seven years older than the average age of the executive branch workforce of 47). The higher retirement rate for veterans, coupled with the higher average age, suggest that the percentage of veterans in our workforce will continue to decrease over the next several years.

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[5] HRMS

Chart 4
Retirement rate for Vietnam-era veterans

Category	Rate
39 & younger	0.0%
40 & over	3.6%
Male	3.3%
Female	2.4%
Not people of color	3.0%
People of color	1.8%
Post-Vietnam era vet	2.4%
Vietnam era vet	18.0%
Nonveteran	2.5%
Veteran	5.0%
People without disabilities	2.6%
People with disabilities	5.8%

2.7% - executive branch retirement rate

Recruitment program proposal options

To develop the recruitment program options requested in the legislation, OFM considered the state's current strategies to recruit and retain veterans, an analysis of veterans' data from the past five years and best practices used in the private sector. These factors have informed four options we offer:

- Option 1 is our current recruitment program.
- Option 2 adds dedicated resources to build a Washington state-specific military-to-civilian skills translator ("crosswalk") and mentorship program.
- Option 3 adds dedicated resources to build a veteran recruitment team.
- Option 4 requests additional time for SHR to provide a more comprehensive recruitment plan.

Option 1 is the current state. This includes the veteran recruitment strategies identified by state agencies in their Human Resources Management Report submitted annually to OFM. Resources for these strategies typically require collaboration among State HR's Workforce Planning and Strategy Team and agency-level HR practitioners. Accordingly, these strategies have varying results across the enterprise, depending on availability and robustness of agency resources:

- Sending agency staff to free or low-cost military recruitment events/fairs.
- Using veteran service organizations such as Hire our Heroes, Wounded Warriors, USO and Onward to Opportunity-NW Edge to promote hiring.
- Engaging and supporting service member transitional programs located at Joint Base Lewis-McChord and Naval Base Kitsap that offer state employment-specific workshops and mock interviews.
- Participation in the state's Veterans Employee Resource Group, which provides employees who are also veterans with a forum to identify best practices and support transitioning members. (More than 60 percent of agencies report participating in this group.)
- Creation of internal veterans' employee resource groups in agencies to provide an internal pathway for mentorships and informational interviews.
- Using the state and national military-to-civilian skills translators.
- Application of veteran's preference percentages per RCW 73.16.010 during the application process.

The value of these activities is laudable. Many agencies send staff to job fairs and other career events at military installations in western Washington, at educational institutions and in nonprofit organizations. In these forums, staff gather résumés, conduct brief one-on-one meet-and-greet sessions and showcase employment opportunities. Agency staff collaborate with a number of military transitional programs to assist with cover letter and résumé building, mock interviews and skills translation. Many agencies designate one or two representatives to support the VERG and attend its monthly meetings. Agencies have access to and use the statewide and national military translation crosswalks such as O'Net and MyNextMove at no cost. The Department of Social and Health Services recently created a state-specific military translation crosswalk, but it has limitations. It could be updated to create a more robust system that will work for more agencies.

Option 2 adds enhancements to current services. It incorporates and then enhances all of Option 1 by adding a few dedicated enterprise-level veteran recruitment resources. Today, not all agencies have the resources to create a meaningful veteran recruitment plan beyond the strategies described in option 1. Having dedicated resources at the enterprise level would help fill this gap. This approach would be more closely aligned with private sector companies, such as Amazon and Starbucks, that have had success with military recruitment teams.

Option 2 calls for:

- Development of a fully functioning, state-specific military translation crosswalk.
- Creation of an enterprise-wide military culture training for hiring managers and HR practitioners.
- Implementation of agency mentorship programs.

The release of the DSHS crosswalk in November 2017 is a good starting point, but the tool needs improvements such as adding the military *officer* corps job categories (currently only the *enlisted* corps is represented) and breaking down leadership skill levels by rank to be a more useful

resource for other executive branch agencies and veteran job seekers to use. Because this tool was developed in DSHS, other state agencies would need to evaluate it for their own use. Improvements would require dedicated IT and HR resources in addition to an internal web platform through either WaTech or a third-party vendor.

The development and implementation of a statewide military culture training is recommended to improve hiring managers' knowledge of military skills and leadership attributes, branch-of-service culture, rank and pay structures, and other skills, leadership attributes and values veterans bring to an organization. It could also be expanded to cover onboarding processes that are necessary to bring veterans into a supportive work environment. To develop this training, collaboration would be necessary among OFM, the Department of Veteran Affairs and DES, and outside resources.

Option 3 is an all-encompassing plan. It includes all the strategies and attributes from the preceding plans, plus the creation of a veteran recruitment team. It calls for:

- Reinstitution of an enterprise-level veteran fellowship program.
- Creation of a veteran recruitment team to provide additional enterprise-wide coordination and support.

With respect to this option, our recommendation is to build and roll out a veteran recruitment team to help transitioning veterans navigate the process of joining state service and being integrated in the state workforce. The team would be composed of a program manager/ supervisor, program specialist, IT specialist and program support staff who would provide enterprise-level veteran recruitment support. The team would maintain and enhance the statewide military crosswalk translator, keeping it up-to-date as the state revises its job classes and as the military revises its classification structures. It would also provide veteran outreach and marketing services, coordinate the Statewide Veterans' Fellowship Program, which would be offered to all veterans and their spouses, and assist and guide agencies across the enterprise in their efforts to recruit and retain veterans. This team would become a one-stop shop for veterans and their spouses who are interested in or applying for state employment.

Option 4 asks for one more year to conduct a more thorough analysis. Five months did not provide us the time needed to conduct a comprehensive review of the recruitment processes of private and other public organizations nor thoroughly examine internal and external data. Given more time and a dedicated temporary (one-year) project specialist, we would be able to conduct cost benefit and return-on-investment analyses, investigate successful recruitment processes in other public and private organizations, gain a better understanding of how to bridge transitional gaps through stronger collaborative ties with local military installations, and identify resources needed to build a successful enterprise-level veteran recruitment team.

Appendix A breaks down each of the four options into an "a la carte" menu and displays the resources needed to support them. This allows the reader to customize other options.

Human resources needed

Given the tight time constraints imposed by the legislation, the following are our best estimates for resources needed to form a veteran recruitment team:

- Program manager (supervise/coordinate the program; would be ongoing)
- Program specialist (would perform senior-level HR and veteran strategist work; would be ongoing)
- IT specialist (coder/developer – to provide coding and data analysis to support crosswalk maintenance and enhancements; 24 months)
- Program support (administrative and customer service-type work; would be ongoing)

Job Class Assumptions	Monthly Salary Assumption	Length of Hire
Program manager	$ 7,083	Ongoing
Program specialist	$ 6,000	Ongoing
IT specialist	$ 6,758	24 months
Program support	$ 3,833	Ongoing

Cost Estimates	Fiscal Year 2018	Fiscal Year 2019	Biennium Total 2017-19	Fiscal Year 2020	Fiscal Year 2021	Biennium Total 2019-21
Salaries	$ -	$ 284,088	$ 284,088	$ 284,088	$ 202,992	$ 487,080
Benefits	$ -	$ 103,656	$ 103,656	$ 103,656	$ 75,684	$ 179,340
Goods and Services	$ -	$ 96,000	$ 96,000	$ 96,000	$ 72,000	$ 168,000
Travel	$ -	$ 9,600	$ 9,600	$ 9,600	$ 7,200	$ 16,800
Equipment	$ -	$ 20,000	$ 20,000	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total	$ -	$ 513,344	$ 513,344	$ 493,344	$ 357,876	$ 851,220

Summary and recommendation

Option 1 maintains our agency and enterprise-level strategies, with few to no changes. Thus, we could not expect better results than those we are now achieving.

Private sector organizations have had success in recruiting and retaining veterans as employees due to their dedicated and well-staffed teams. Having a team that understands an organization's business needs and identifies the veteran talent that aligns with those needs is key to that success. Having the resources to create a strong veteran recruitment program is a necessity; private organizations have made this a priority.

Without additional resources, option 2 or 3 is not possible. The state of Washington, as an employer, has many opportunities to tap into the veteran talent pipeline in a more targeted fashion, like our private sector partners do, as long as we acquire and maintain the resources necessary to do so effectively.

Option 2 continues to use all of option 1 strategies plus improves the current DSHS military crosswalk translator service by incorporating military officers and more detailed military skills-matching processes to our current system. We would also create an enterprise-wide military culture training for our hiring managers and HR practitioners, in addition to agency-level mentorships. These provide hired veterans with professional development and offer veteran applicants a point person to consult with and learn more about an agency's culture and needs.

Option 3 or 4 is our recommended option. If we are provided a one-year extension, we will be able to conduct a more comprehensive evaluation for each option. More time would allow us to contact more comparable organizations and private sector partners to identify successful programs.

Notwithstanding the granting of an additional year to conduct a more comprehensive study and potentially offer additional options, an enterprise-level veteran recruitment team is essential if we want to compete with the private sector. This team would identify our business needs and how to align those needs with the skill sets veterans possess. Through these teams, we would define how to give credit to veterans based on their military skill sets.

Option 1		Option 2		Option 3		Option 4		Final Plan Select Options (a la carte)
	Resources		Resources		Resources		Resources	
Attend free job fairs	Agency level/ OFM SHR staff	Attend professional military recruitment events/fairs representing the enterprise as an employer of choice.	• Program specialist • Event registration fees applied	Same as options 1 and 2	Program specialist	Provide a more comprehensive recruitment plan, and extend draft plan deadline to January 2019	Project specialist	
Collaboration with external public/private/nonprofit partners, veteran service organizations	Agency level/ OFM SHR staff	Collaboration with external public/private/nonprofit partners, veteran service organizations	Agency level/ OFM SHR staff	Enterprise-level coordination among agencies and external public/private/nonprofit partners, veteran service organizations	Program specialist			
VERG support (agency-level participation)	Agency level/ OFM SHR staff	Same as option 1	Agency level/ OFM SHR staff	Collaborate with VERG to provide communication support and coordination of activities both internally and externally for the enterprise	• Program specialist • Program support			
Internal agency employee resource groups	Agency level	Same as option 1	Agency level	Same as option 1	Agency level			
National military skills translator (generic level, nonstate specific)	Agency level	Improve the current DSHS military crosswalk skills translator	• Program specialist • IT specialist	Build a more robust statewide military crosswalk skills translator, while also supporting future updates	• Program specialist • IT specialist • Program support			
Agency-specific reverse job fairs	Agency level	Coordinate enterprise-level reverse job fairs	• Program specialist • Program support	Same as options 1 and 2	• Program specialist • Program support			
Informational interviews	Agency level	Same as option 1	Agency level	Same as option 1	Agency level			
		Mentorship program (agency level)	• Program specialist • Agency level	Enterprise level Veteran's Fellowship Program (same concept as Hiring our Heroes Corporate Fellowship)	• Program mgr/supervisor • Program specialist • IT specialist • Program support			
		Military culture training, enterprise-wide requirement	• Program specialist/HRC4 • DES (fee for service)	Military culture training, enterprise wide-requirement	• Program specialist • DES (fee for service)			
				Build a veterans recruitment team	• Program manager • Program specialist • IT specialist • Program support			

Resources needed to support option 1:

No additional resources required

Resources needed to support option 2: Hire Team –
- Program manager/supervisor (existing)
- Program specialist (new)
- IT specialist
- Program support (existing)
- 3rd party vendor fee for military crosswalk skills translator

Resources needed to support option 3:
- Program manager/supervisor
- Program specialist
- IT specialist
- Program support

Resources needed to support option 4:
- Project specialist (temp 1 year)

Office of Financial Management
P.O. Box 43113 • Olympia, WA • 98504-3113
360-902-0599