
Date: December 27, 2021

To: Governor Tony Evers
Senate President Chris Kapenga
Assembly Speaker Robin Vos
Senate Chief Clerk Michael Queensland
Assembly Chief Clerk Edward Blazel
Secretary Emilie Amundson, Department of Children and Families
Secretary Mary Kolar, Department of Veteran's Affairs

From: Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek, Department of Workforce Development



Memorandum: Hire Heroes - Wisconsin Transitional Jobs Program for Veterans 2021 Annual Report

Hire Heroes Program Background

2017 Wisconsin Act 195 established the Hire Heroes program, which offers subsidized employment known as transitional jobs to veterans. Three state agencies are charged with administering the program deliverables: 1) Department of Workforce Development (DWD), 2) Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), and 3) Department of Children and Families (DCF).

DWD will allocate up to \$400,000 each fiscal year for subsidized employment placements. Administrative costs are expected to be minimized by using existing transitional jobs site agreements and other participant tracking tools used by DCF in the administration of the Transform Milwaukee Jobs and Transitional Jobs programs. Eligible participants may engage in the Hire Heroes program for up to 1,040 work hours and DWD will reimburse participating employers for costs, including wage subsidies (up to the federal minimum wage), federal social security and Medicare taxes, state and federal unemployment insurance contributions, or taxes and worker's compensation insurance premiums, if any.

To be eligible to participate in the Hire Heroes program, all of the following criteria must be met. Applicants must:

1. Be at least 18 years of age,
2. Be a veteran, as defined under [s. 45.01\(12\)](#), who is verified by DVA,
3. Submit an application to the program at any time after the date of discharge from military service,
4. Be ineligible to participate in the Wisconsin Works (W-2) program,
5. Be unemployed for at least four weeks, and
6. Satisfy all requirements related to substance abuse screening, testing, and treatment.

Based on recommendations by the administering agencies, the Hire Heroes program was amended by [2021 Wisconsin Act 58](#) on July 8, 2021 to expand eligibility to additional veterans. Act 58 removed a requirement that participants had to have been discharged from their military service for at least seven years, which had been flagged as impacting program participation.

Program Implementation

During State Fiscal Year 2021, the Hire Heroes program faced continued challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The related economic conditions have also resulted in employers more likely to directly hire applicants without the state subsidizing wages. There were no program referrals made to DWD and there were no applications submitted by veterans served directly by DWD Office of Veterans Employment Services (DWD-OVES) staff in State Fiscal Year 2021.

The DWD Hire Heroes Project Coordinator left the position in early 2021. Given the program's limited demand and DWD's competing staffing priorities in 2021, the position has remained vacant since that time. The lack of a dedicated staff person and the challenges posed by the pandemic impacted program participation and referrals. DWD anticipates hiring a new Hire Heroes Project Coordinator in 2022. Despite the ongoing economic conditions, there are opportunities to increase the program now that the seven-year limitation has been removed by Act 58. Over the past 12 months, the average unemployment rate for Wisconsin Veterans was 4.8 percent¹, which is higher than Wisconsin's 3 percent unemployment rate² for the general population. Training will be conducted with DWD, DCF, and DVA staff to address the changes in eligibility requirements and the process for submitting applications and referrals among agencies. It is anticipated that these changes, as well as the opportunities discussed below, will result in program expansion.

DWD has provided local workforce development boards with funding through the [Worker Advancement Initiative](#). This initiative includes funding for locally customized transitional jobs programs, which provides new opportunities for co-enrollment of eligible veterans into the local programs as well as Hire Heroes.

Additionally, with the removal of the requirement to be within seven years of discharge date, there are now increased opportunities to utilize the Hire Heroes program for veterans who are in the care of the Department of Corrections.

Interagency staff will continue to work together to create worksite agreements for Hire Heroes by using existing transitional jobs site agreements and participant tracking tools used by DCF for the Transform Milwaukee Jobs and Transitional Jobs programs. In 2022, staff from DWD, DVA, and DCF will meet regularly to ensure successful implementation of the program. This includes quarterly meetings, development of effective training, evaluating and measuring success, developing and refining recruiting strategies, and generating other ideas to increase program enrollment.

Program Outreach

DCF, DVA, and DWD have worked together to market the program through existing outreach activities, partnerships, collaborations, and existing communication channels. In 2021, the Hire Heroes project coordinator worked with DVA's Veterans Benefit Resource Center and Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP) and DCF to establish partnerships with transitional jobs partners throughout the state, and all have assisted in outreach activities. DWD used its [JobCenterofWisconsin.com](#) registrants to reach out to all potentially eligible veterans directly through email. Below is a list of many of the organizations, programs, and contacts who have been provided information about the Hire Heroes Program through outreach activity since the start of the program:

- Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program grantees: Center for Veterans Issues (CVI), Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists, Inc.,
- Supportive Services for Veteran Families grantee's – CVI, Indianhead Community Action Agency, and Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin,

¹ Current Population Survey, 12-month moving average, Dec. 2020-Nov. 2021. CPS estimates, particularly for unemployment and for small States, are unpublished and subject to rather large sampling error and reliability limitations. For more information about the use of state estimates from the CPS, see <https://www.bls.gov/lau/notescps.htm>

² Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), November 2021.

- Wisconsin's County Veteran Service Officers and Tribal Veteran Service Officers,
- University of Wisconsin System Veteran Services Office/Coordinator,
- Wisconsin Technical College Veteran Services Office/Coordinator,
- Veteran Health Administration (VHA)'s Community Employment Coordinator's – Madison, Tomah and Milwaukee,
- VHA – Housing and Urban Development Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing and Grant and Per Diem Program – Madison and Tomah,
- VHA Therapeutic Supported Employment Services programs – Madison and Tomah (connecting with Milwaukee program in progress),
- VHA – Veteran Justice Outreach – Madison, Tomah and Milwaukee,
- Veterans Benefit Administration Regional Office – Milwaukee,
- WDVA – Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program – Statewide,
- Vet Center – Madison,
- Homeless Shelters – Statewide,
- Disability IN Wisconsin,
- Catholic Multi-Cultural Center – Madison,
- Transitional Jobs Collaborative – Milwaukee (Monthly Meetings),
- American Legion's and VFW's Statewide,
- Community Based Organizations – Dryhooch, Porchlight, NAMI Wisconsin, Forward Community Investments, Veterans Opportunity to Work, etc.,
- Job Fairs statewide, UW Health walk-in Wednesday, Red Cross, Salvation Army, and
- Wisconsin Air National Guard Benefit Expo.

In 2022, all three agencies plan to increase outreach efforts across the state, as pandemic protocols allow. DVA and DCF are increasing visibility by including program information on their websites, which includes the update to the eligibility criteria.

Outcomes

Since the Hire Heroes Program launched on April 1, 2019, approximately 12 veterans applied to the program. Six were found ineligible, while three were referred to employers and directly hired without a subsidy. Two veterans were hired under the subsidy with an average wage of \$18.50 per hour. There are currently no veterans in the program.