
Date: Dec. 29, 2022

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 2022 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 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.
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 Outreach

DCF, DVA, and DWD worked together to market the program through existing outreach activities, partnerships, collaborations, and communication channels. DWD screened JobCenterofWisconsin.com registrants to reach out to all potentially eligible veterans directly through email. Below is a list of the many organizations, programs, and contacts who have been provided information about the Hire Heroes Program through outreach activity since the program start:

- 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.
- 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 – Milwaukee.
- Catholic Multi-Cultural Center – Madison.
- Transitional Jobs Collaborative – Milwaukee (Monthly Meetings).
- American Legion and VFW Posts Statewide.
- Community Based Organizations – Dryhootch, Porchlight, NAMI Wisconsin, Forward Community Investments, Veterans Opportunity to Work, etc.
- Job Fairs statewide, UW Health walk-in Wednesday, Red Cross, Salvation Army.
- Wisconsin Air National Guard Benefit Expo.

DWD, DVA and DCF increased visibility by including program information on their websites, which includes the update to the eligibility criteria. DWD also provided local workforce development boards with funding through the [Worker Advancement Initiative](#). This initiative includes funding for locally customized transitional jobs programs, providing new opportunities for eligible veterans for co-enrollment into both Hire Heroes and local programs.

Program Outcomes

Unemployment rates for all Wisconsin workers, including veterans specifically, remained at near record lows throughout 2022. Employers are seeking veterans to fill their open roles and veterans are finding employment opportunities that fit their needs without the assistance of wage subsidies. DWD's Office of Veteran Employment Service (OVES) successfully placed numerous veterans experiencing significant barriers to employment in 2022. In fact, for program year 2022 Q1, Wisconsin ranked 5th in the nation for its Uniform National Threshold Entered Employment Rate (UNTEER) for veterans and eligible persons. During that period, 59.2%¹ of veterans receiving services went from unemployed to employed with DWD's

¹ Percentage of exiters who were unemployed or received notice of termination/layoff at program entry and were then employed in the first quarter after exit.

assistance. However, likely due to the unique post-pandemic employment environment, DWD did not enroll any veterans into the Hire Heroes program and no employers sought to participate in 2022.

Program Opportunities

In response to recommendations made by Governor Tony Evers' Blue Ribbon Commission on Veteran Opportunity, Governor Evers awarded DWD \$500,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funds to support Wisconsin veterans and employers and to enhance the Hire Heroes program. While the current labor market allows more veterans, including those with significant barriers, to secure traditional employment, subsidized employment through the Hire Heroes program may still present the best option for some veterans to access new employment opportunities.

In 2023, DWD, DCF, and DVA will continue their efforts to connect veterans and employers through the Hire Heroes program. Using the additional ARPA funds, OVES will also perform additional outreach of its veteran employment services, which will, in turn, offer new opportunities for them to also promote Hire Heroes as a workforce solution in appropriate circumstances. DWD will also explore alternative service models that may increase Hire Heroes program participation, such as through expanding apprenticeship opportunities for veterans, connecting veterans to work-related supports and other benefits, and incentivizing employers with on-the-job learning reimbursements. DWD will share insights and lessons learned with DVA and DCF and inform policymakers on any opportunities for program enhancement.