



EMPLOYERS TOOLKIT

Hiring and supporting veterans and military spouses
SkillBridge • SpouseWorks • MERG • Recruiting Steps

READY TO START?

Sign up to partner with Veterans of California

Get matched with transitioning talent, MERG launch guidance, and program support:

<https://veteransofcalifornia.com/contact>

A strategic hiring advantage — not charity.

Why the military community

Roughly 200,000 service members leave the military each year. They arrive with security clearances, federally funded technical training, and leadership experience most companies spend a decade developing in-house. Their spouses bring the same adaptability, plus the resilience built by rebuilding a household and a career every two to three years.

FEDERAL INCENTIVE

Work Opportunity Tax Credit: up to \$9,600 per qualified veteran hire

Credits scale with the veteran's circumstances — unemployment duration, SNAP receipt, or a service-connected disability. Filing is a single certification request (IRS Form 8850 plus ETA Form 9061) submitted to your state workforce agency within **28 days** of the start date.

What your organization gains

Proven leadership under pressure	Judgment that has already been stress-tested at scale.
Mission-first work ethic	Accountability that shows up in attendance, safety, and follow-through.
Transferable technical skills	Logistics, cyber, aviation, healthcare, intel — trained to standard.
Security-clearance value	Vetting investment often worth tens of thousands per person.
Adaptability	Trained to plan, adjust, and execute when conditions change.
Stronger retention	Structured military hiring and support programs raise retention.

1. DoW SkillBridge

Formerly DoD SkillBridge. A Department of War program that lets service members spend their final up-to-180 days on active duty working at your company — full time, in a real role, while the military continues to pay their salary and benefits.

Why employers use it

- **No labor cost.** The service member remains on military pay and benefits during the internship.
- **Extended working interview.** Up to six months to evaluate fit before extending an offer.
- **Pre-vetted talent.** Candidates arrive with clearances, certifications, and documented training.
- **Conversion pipeline.** Many participants convert to full-time hires on day one of civilian life.

How to get started

- Apply to become an authorized SkillBridge organization at skillbridge.osd.mil.
- Define 1–3 target roles, a training plan, and a supervising mentor for each.
- Sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the participating installation or program office.
- Post opportunities and recruit through installation transition offices and partner networks.
- Set a conversion target and track it — offer rate, acceptance rate, one-year retention.

Common mistake: treating SkillBridge as job shadowing. Assign real work with real deliverables — that is what produces a hire-ready candidate and a strong reputation with transition offices.

2. SpouseWorks

SpouseWorks (which replaced the former SECO name) is the Department of War's employment and career program for military spouses — the most overlooked talent pool in America: highly educated, chronically underemployed, and underemployed because of relocation, not capability.

Why employers use it

- **Portable employees.** Remote and distributed roles keep a strong performer through every PCS move.
- **Retention multiplier.** Employing the spouse strengthens retention of the service member too.
- **Free candidate access.** Post roles and connect through the federal spouse employment ecosystem.

How to get started

- Register your organization at spouseworks.militaryonesource.mil and publish spouse-friendly roles.
- Flag remote-eligible and portable positions explicitly in job postings.
- Write relocation-tolerant policies: remote-first options, transfer pathways, and no penalty for résumé gaps.
- Train recruiters to read a relocation-driven résumé gap as mobility, not instability.

3. MERG — Military Employee Resource Group

A MERG is the internal engine that makes military hiring stick. It turns individual hires into a community, a referral pipeline, and public proof that your company is genuinely military-friendly.

What a strong MERG delivers

- **Retention and belonging** — a peer network that shortens the transition curve.
- **An internal talent pipeline** — members refer, mentor, and vouch for candidates.
- **Employer brand with external weight** — credibility toward military-friendly recognitions.
- **A leadership development lab** — chair, board, and project-team roles build visible leaders.

Launch checklist

- **Charter and governance.** Purpose, membership (open to allies), scope, and executive sponsor.
- **President and board.** Named leaders with dedicated hours protected by management.
- **Budget.** Even a small annual budget signals the group is real.
- **Recurring meetings.** A predictable monthly cadence beats ambitious but sporadic events.
- **Signature moments.** Veterans Day, Memorial Day, Military Spouse Appreciation Day, Month of the Military Child.
- **Onboarding buddy program.** Pair every new military hire with a MERG member in week one.
- **Internal hub.** One page with benefits, resources, points of contact, and the events calendar.
- **Measure it.** Membership, participation, referral hires, and 12-month retention of military hires.

4. Military recruiting: a step-by-step plan

Appointing a dedicated military recruiter is the single highest-leverage move an employer can make. Below is the sequence most organizations can execute within one hiring cycle.

Step 1 — Name an owner	Designate a military recruiter or talent lead accountable for military hiring outcomes.
Step 2 — Map the roles	Identify 5–10 roles where military experience is a direct match, then write MOS/rating crosswalks for each.
Step 3 — Rewrite the postings	Strip unnecessary degree requirements, name the equivalent military experience, and state clearance value explicitly.
Step 4 — Build the channels	SkillBridge, SpouseWorks, installation transition offices, virtual and on-base career fairs, and veteran service organizations.
Step 5 — Train the interviewers	Teach hiring managers to translate rank, scope, and mission language into scope-of-responsibility terms.
Step 6 — Close the loop internally	Hand every new hire to the MERG buddy program on day one and file WOTC certification within 28 days.
Step 7 — Measure and publish	Track applications, offers, conversions, and one-year retention. Report the numbers to leadership quarterly.

Your first 30 days

A short, realistic starting sequence. None of it requires new headcount.

- Week 1 — Name the owner and pick the target roles.
- Week 2 — Submit the SkillBridge application and register on SpouseWorks.
- Week 3 — Rewrite postings with military crosswalks; brief hiring managers.
- Week 4 — Stand up the MERG charter and name an executive sponsor.
- Ongoing — File WOTC within 28 days of every qualified start date.

SIGN UP

Partner with Veterans of California

We help California employers stand up SkillBridge pipelines, launch a MERG, connect with military spouse talent, and get recognized for it. Tell us your target roles and we will point you at the right programs and people.

<https://veteransofcalifornia.com/contact>

Employers hub: <https://veteransofcalifornia.com/employers>

Newsletter & updates: <https://veteransofcalifornia.com/subscribe>

Official program links

- DoW SkillBridge — skillbridge.osd.mil
- SpouseWorks — spouseworks.militaryonesource.mil/portal/
- Military OneSource — militaryonesource.mil
- WOTC (U.S. Department of Labor) — dol.gov/agencies/eta/wotc
- VA family and caregiver benefits — va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/

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