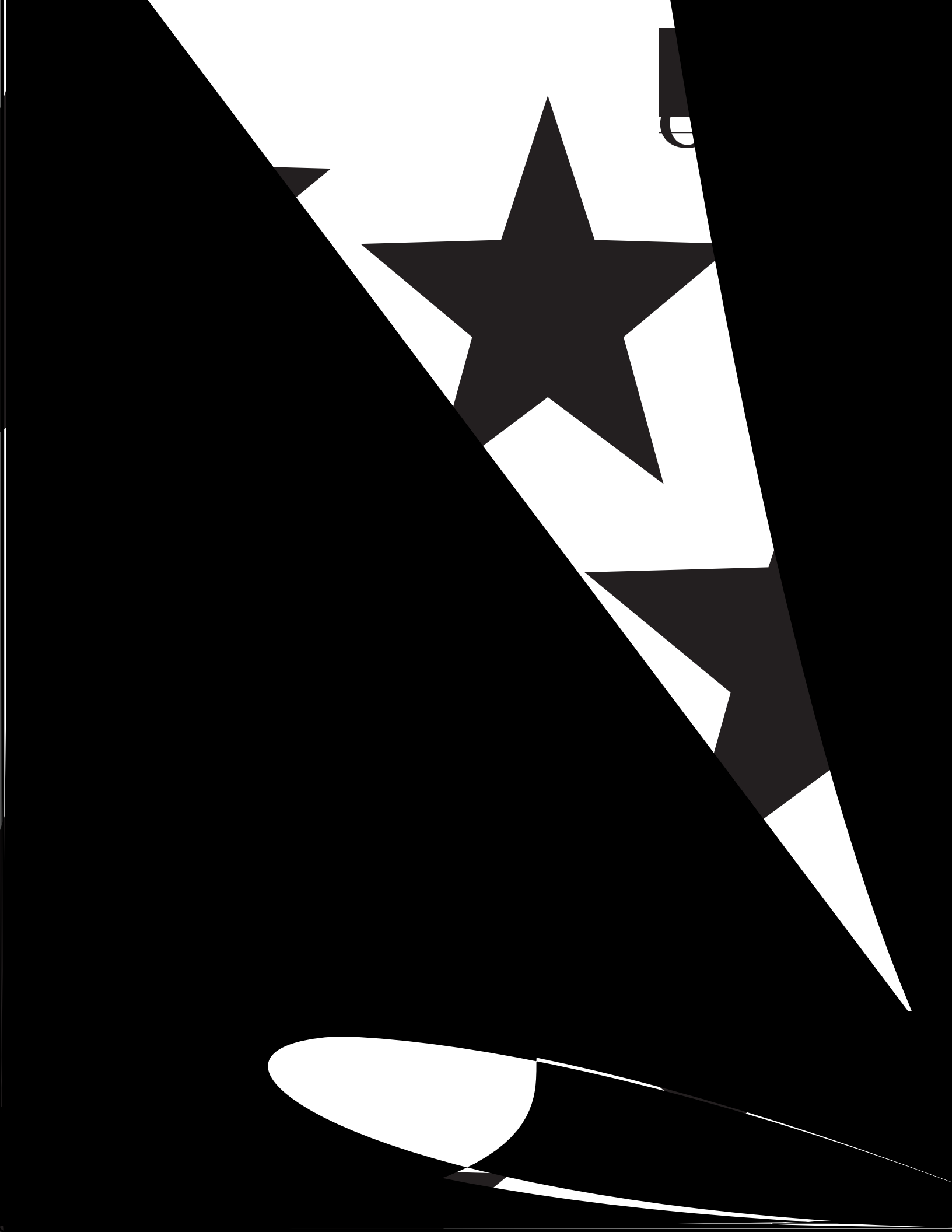


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**ACE's 2015 Service  
Member and Veteran**





*Leadership and Advocacy*

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# Executive Summary

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On June 5–6, 2014, the American Council on Education (ACE) spearheaded the Service Member and Veteran Academic Advising Summit. The goal of the summit was to provide a space for participants to communicate and collaborate, as well as to share promising practices for better supporting service members and veterans in their transition from military service to higher education and the workforce. Approximately 100 participants, including representatives from institutions of higher education, military and veteran service organizations, U.S. federal agencies, the U.S. Armed Forces, employers, and student veterans—gathered to identify existing and emerging issues related to the college admissions process for service members and veterans. The summit led to the creation of five themes and recommendations for improving service members and veterans' enrollment in higher education institutions.

## Theme 1: Individualized, Flexible, and Relationship-Centered Support Services

The need for individual, flexible, and relationship-centered support services for service members and veterans emerged as a central theme from the summit. When considering the pursuit of a college education, prospective students need to consider multiple factors, including college affordability, career goals, needed education or training to attain those goals, institutions that provide that particular training or education, and the type of additional support they will need when entering higher education.

### Recommendations:

1. Increase one-on-one services.
2. Train advisors on military culture and language.
3. Offer peer-to-peer mentorship to offset limited available personnel.
4. Effectively use online advising tools to educate service members and veterans about the admissions process.

## Theme 2: Self-Advocacy of Service Members and Veterans

Participants noted the necessity of self-advocacy as a means for student empowerment, and many speakers focused on efforts to accomplish this. A common theme that emerged from summit discussions was the need not only for stakeholder organizations to advocate for service members and veterans, but also for service members and veterans to be empowered to advocate for themselves.

### Recommendations:

1. Educate service members and veterans about college admissions and higher education.
2. Develop peer networks while in the military and once discharged.
3. Facilitate increased connections between the military, higher education, and employers.



## Future Work

Moving forward, ACE seeks to convene a second Service Member and Veteran Academic Advising Summit in 2015. Working with participants from the first summit, along with other interested parties, ACE will frame an agenda around the five key themes derived from the first summit. The goal of the second summit will be to create working groups around each individual theme, with each group identifying collaborative practices between stakeholders for helping service members and veterans access and complete higher education, and to develop an actionable plan to disseminate these promising practices more broadly.



## Introduction

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Between April 2007 and December 2014, the American Council on Education (ACE) had the opportunity to provide academic support to over 750 severely injured service



## Summit Participants

### Panel 1: Voices of Student Veterans

Five student veterans discussed their views on institutional programs and services. Four of the summit panelists participated in ACE's SIMV program, and a fifth veteran discussed her experience during the college admissions and application process. Participating student veterans shared details surrounding their experience in the SIMV program, which provided individualized tutoring and academic support services, in addition to counseling during their transition out of the military and into higher education. These panelists shared that the SIMV program experience was helpful during their transition, reflecting findings from a survey of 95 SIMV participants conducted in February 2014. The fifth student veteran involved in the panel discussion did not participate in SIMV, but instead went through the admissions and application process with support from staff at the military education center where she was stationed.

#### Participants:

Five veteran students, four of whom participated in ACE's Severely Injured Military Veterans: Fulfilling Their Dreams program

### Panel 2: Perspectives from Federal Government Agencies

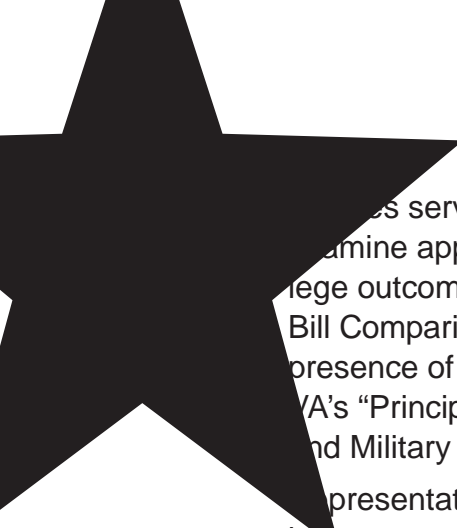
Summit participants from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Education (ED), and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) discussed current efforts to support the transition and higher education of service members and veterans, and provided insights into programs that are working and changes that are needed to improve those programmatic efforts.

#### Participants:


Representatives from the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), the DoD Transition Assistance Program, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Consumer and Financial Protection Bureau

DoD representatives highlighted recent changes to the Transition Assistance Program, now known as Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success). These modifications were designed to have transitioning service members become career ready and meet mandatory career readiness standards set by DoD. Ultimately, Transition GPS provides information to service members who are separating or retiring from active duty to support their transition to civilian life. The program consists of one-day workshops at military installations nationwide, where attendees learn about financial management; various VA benefits; resiliency; and employment tools, which include job searches, career decision making, current labor market conditions and needs, and interviewing techniques. Transitioning service members have the option of participating in two-day workshops focused on higher education, technical training, or entrepreneurship. Furthermore, DoD discussed a pilot program focused on allowing service members the opportunity to gain on-the-job training in civilian occupations through apprenticeships six months prior to exiting the military. The program provides an example of DoD's commitment to facilitate the transfer of military experience and training to relevant certification and licensures.

VA representatives discussed the GI Bill Comparison Tool (see Appendix), a website that




...es service members, veterans, and their families to calculate education benefits, examine approved postsecondary programs, and compare institutions across several college outcomes (i.e., graduation rates, loan default rates, and average borrowing). The GI Bill Comparison Tool also provides information on the number of GI Bill recipients, the presence of student veteran groups, and whether that institution has committed to the VA's "Principles of Excellence" or ED's "8 Keys to Success: Supporting Veterans, Military and Military Families on Campus."



...representatives from ED focused their discussion on the financial education tools they have created. ED offers a financial aid toolkit intended to educate professionals working with service members, veterans, and their families about financial aid opportunities. ED emphasized the importance of training college advisors to ensure that financial aid information is effectively communicated to service members and veterans. ED encouraged college personnel to direct military-connected individuals to their student aid website and to VA's GI Bill® website (see Appendix).

CFPB representatives discussed their Paying for College tool (see Appendix), which is designed to help students make informed choices when considering financial aid offers. Representatives talked about the importance of service members and veterans being able to make informed decisions when examining how to pay for college and to compare their options when choosing a college to attend. Notably, CFPB personnel highlighted the importance of understanding student loans and repayment options for service members and veterans who anticipate attending institutions that are not fully covered by their VA/DoD education benefits.

### Panel 3: Insights from Educators



During the educators' panel, representatives from higher education discussed their work to serve service members and veterans.

Student Veterans of America (SVA) discussed findings from the Million Records Project, noting that this foundational report provided the first glimpse into graduation rates among GI Bill users after 9/11 (see Appendix). The project tracked GI Bill users from 2002 to 2010 and provided information on types of degrees conferred, major fields while in college, designed to

West from the local Marine Corps installation, Camp Pendleton.

Other efforts mentioned by education representatives included:

- y Veteran-specific mandatory orientations prior to beginning college
- y Transfer credit tools to allow students to move from community college into a four-year institution
- y Outreach to service members at local military installations

#### Panel 4: Views from Employers and the U.S. Department of Labor

During this panel, employers spoke about programs and resources to strengthen the outreach, hiring, promotion, and overall support of veterans in their workforces.

USAA discussed a program it offers its employees: Vet4IT seeks to fill computer science positions by training veterans in partnership with Alamo Colleges (TX). The program pays for veterans through the education and internship periods and, after 22 weeks, allows them to enter the company at an entry-level salary.

Similarly, Northrup Grumman has a program to support the transition and development of workers through a cyber-apprenticeship program for veterans. Additionally, Northrup Grumman adopts a number of activities to support the outreach to and hiring of veterans. One example is the employment transition “boot camps” provided for veterans entering the organization, particularly among wounded warriors. Boot camps include courses on how to develop a career path within the company, translate military skills, adapt to the civilian culture, and improve their resume.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) offers the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS). The program includes employment workshops through Transition







Effectively use online advising tools to educate service members and veterans about the college admissions process.  
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## Theme 2

### Self-Advocacy

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A second theme that emerged from the roundtable discussions centered on the idea of self-advocacy as central to service members and veterans' college enrollment. Military-affiliated individuals need to receive accurate and timely information on the college admissions process so that they can advocate for educational opportunities that best fit their career goals. An educational campaign, peer networks, and increased collaboration between stakeholders (i.e., federal agencies, higher education, and employers) are all recommendations designed to educate and empower service members and veterans in demystifying the college admissions process.




### Key Insights

Identification of appropriate resources.

Having access to clear, concise, and accurate admissions and application information is important to successfully advocate for oneself. During the summit, participants found that there are over 46,000 resources currently available for service members and veterans, ranging from using vocational rehabilitation to various GI Bill programs and scholarships. The existence of such a large amount of admissions resources for individuals makes the process difficult to understand and many service members and veterans have problems differentiating the trustworthy resources from the fraudulent, often either accepting false information or ignoring supportive resources altogether. Summit participants recommended creating an aggregate website that pulls together currently existing and reliable resources in a manner that would help make the information less overwhelming. Having trustworthy information in a single location could help equip service members and veterans make informed choices and effectively self-advocate.

Early intervention while in the military.



Learning about the various postsecondary opportunities available takes time. Many service members and veterans are first-time students who have not had the support that younger, more traditional students have. Summit participants highlighted the need to start educating service members about the postsecondary education process early in their military career. While there have been many enhancements to the Transition Assistance Program, transitioning service members who partake in the program receive a significant amount of information in a small amount of time. In the midst of focusing on personal issues, such as housing, financial security, and other competing responsibilities, college admissions and application information can be difficult to retain. Participants believed starting the admissions and application process earlier would authentically help service members and veterans have the knowledge necessary to make well-educated college-going decisions and to be able to effectively self-advocate.

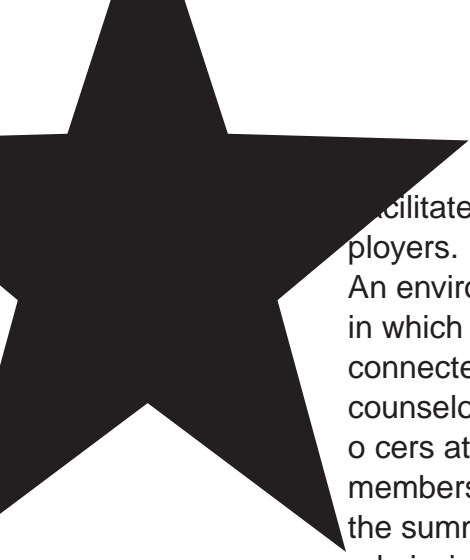


### Making the jump from “veteran friendly” to “veteran ready.”

Discussion centered on creating environments at postsecondary institutions and the workplace where service members and veterans have their voices heard. As one employer suggested, this means understanding the difference between organizations that are veteran friendly and those that are veteran ready, and making changes that allow service members and veterans to have a strong voice in an organization's process of becoming veteran ready. In other words, summit participants noted that having a large number of service members and veterans in their college or community does not signal that they are facilitating their success. Higher education institutions and employers need to be ready to provide the needed support services to service members and veterans so that they can meet their postsecondary and employment goals. Participants argued being friendly to veterans will not provide them a college education or employment. Active steps should be taken to inform them of opportunities to learn and grow professionally.

### Bridging the communication gap.

Many participants pointed to gaps in the language spoken by service members and veterans, and their struggle to adapt to terminology common among institutions and employers. Not only should institutions and employers make efforts to familiarize themselves with conventional military language, but service members and veterans need to learn the language of higher education and the workforce. As one summit



facilitate increased connections between the military, higher education, and employers.

An environment that facilitates service member and veteran self-advocacy is one in which military representatives, college admissions personnel, and employers are connected in ways that ensure mutual understanding and cooperation. The ACE counselor in the SIMV program highlighted the importance of contacting education officers at military installations to provide college admissions information to service members before they leave the service. One of the service members present during the summit believed that working collaboratively with the military to learn about the admissions process while in the service would prove highly beneficial.

## Theme 3

### Cross-Stakeholder Communication and Information Consolidation

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A major theme arising from the summit was the need for military branches, federal agencies, higher education institutions, and employers to communicate with one another in order to maintain efficient processes and work together toward common goals. Veterans are likely to navigate many of these stakeholder groups at different stages of their careers. Participants explored actions to consolidate wide-ranging resources and ensure that veterans transfer seamlessly from one organization to the next.

### Key Insights

Consolidating and centralizing institutional resources.

Participants emphasized the need for centralized access to resources and support services. For example, a number of colleges and universities offer veteran-specific orientations to help service members and veterans understand their educational benefits and institutional support services. Providing academic counseling services and transfer advisors, as well as designating a specific space for veterans on campus, are examples of how institutions ensure that service members and veterans receive adequate information on available resources and college entrance pathways.

Communicating available resources across stakeholder groups.

Participants mentioned the need for greater communication of available resources across stakeholder groups. The DoD indicated that use of online services and dissemination of information across different collaborative partners in pilot programs they are working on is showing promise for solving this information gap. Communication can involve outreach with military and veteran service organizations, such as the American Legion, SVA, and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW).

Clear communication of guidelines and requirements.


In one roundtable discussion, participants described the most challenging aspects



Provide regular cross-stakeholder meetings at national and regional conferences. Summit discussants suggested that one of the best ways to enhance cross-stakeholder communication is to hold regular meetings. This ensures that stakeholders share best practices and that each organizational sector (i.e., postsecondary institutions, federal agencies, and employers) voices its needs, resources, and practices.







encies that make them ideal for many career paths, especially as effective leaders and managers. As a result, employers should increase their efforts in making a strong business case for hiring more veterans by acknowledging their unique qualities instilled during their military service—qualities that employers value and require.





# Theme 5

## Capacity, Knowledge, and Awareness Building

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The national broad theme emerging from the summit centered on building capacity, knowledge, and awareness across stakeholder groups regarding the concerns central to service members and veterans' college education. Participants explored the ways their organizations could work together to deepen this knowledge base, engage their communities, and expand their capacity to serve this growing college-going population.

### Key Insights

Proactive engagement from the top down.

Higher education institutions described working toward active engagement in providing programs and services for service members and veterans. This includes providing training for faculty and staff to increase understanding of service member and veteran needs. One example of this kind of proactive engagement is the effort to reach out directly to military installations to relay information to service members early in the transition phase. For example, a summit participant from GMU argued that the administration needs to be proactive in prioritizing funding for programs focused on reaching out to, admitting, and retaining service members during and once out of the military. While veterans' services initially received grant funding at GMU, the university recognized the benefit of these programs in supporting veterans and was able to secure continued internal funding as a result.

Engaging and educating communities.

Participants highlighted campuses that engage with service members at military installations to provide early information on college admissions. Institutions also incorporated efforts to reach community members supporting service members and veterans and created alumni support groups. These efforts continued despite noted difficulties building bonds with community members and the military.

Fully evaluating program impacts.


Many attendees pointed to the need for greater evaluation of current program outcomes as part of the goal to improve the knowledge base among stakeholders. The DoD, for example, indicated a desire to understand the impact of current education programs to inform future improvements. Various data-tracking initiatives are underway, but need to be expanded to understand how programs are preparing student veterans for employment. Additionally, colleges and universities have begun to ask whether and how veteran-specific programs and services directly or indirectly facilitate their college access and success. Institutional representatives noted the increase in support services; however, questions remain as to whether such offerings make a difference.




## Recommendations

Provide training for professionals working with service members and veterans. Participants discussed the need to provide training to professionals working with military and veteran services. Specifically, attendees suggested educating student affairs professionals on veterans' issues while thinking about how to make train-the-trainer initiatives scalable.

Create opportunities for dialogue between civilians and military-connected individuals.



Participants talked about the importance of creating opportunities on- and off-campus for interactive discussions between civilians and service members and veterans. These interactions should include college students, faculty, and staff and their service member and veteran peers. For instance, the University of California, Santa Cruz offers an event called Making the Circle Bigger, which brings together veterans and nonveteran students, faculty, and staff with the goal of fostering community and understanding of military-connected culture and issues. Off-campus, some participants noted The Telling Project (see Appendix) as a way to understand veterans' experiences through the arts. The Telling Project is one example of a program that uses creativity to help enhance dialogue among stakeholders, build awareness of veteran issues, and reduce stigmas held by both communities (i.e., civilians and veterans).



While face-to-face interaction was noted as a strong component of advising programs for many service members and veterans, others suggested that there is an opportunity to use social media tools to engage new services with different preferences. Participants noted a lack of understanding of military culture and customs among civilians. In contrast, participants noted the need for service members and veterans to learn how to conform their skill sets to the civilian culture in order to increase their chances of becoming employed. To bridge the gap in communication between the military and civilians, discussants suggested harnessing social media as a way to reduce misconceptions about both communities.

## Conclusion

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The goal of the Service Member and Veteran Academic Advising Summit was to provide a space for participants to communicate and collaborate, as well as to share promising practices to better support service members and veterans in their transition from military service to higher education and the workforce. The summit led to the creation of key themes and recommendations for improving service members' and veterans' higher education enrollment, which were discussed in this report. Notably, participants pointed to key recommendations for enhancing college admissions information for transitioning service members and veterans.

Among the most important outcomes from the summit were the recognition of the significance of providing holistic and timely pre-college enrollment advising, and the need to include true costs associated with attending specific institutions as well as available college financial aid. Participants discussed several initiatives and programs that are helping address this goal, although more work is needed.

Additional findings from the summit include the need for more standardized data on college costs and financial aid, and the importance of providing timely and accurate information to service members and veterans.



## Special Guests and Hosts

Panel #1: Voices of Student Veterans	Lacy Evans, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill John J. (Joe) Houser, Georgetown University (DC) Kenneth Lyon, University of Mary Washington (VA) David Smith, Georgetown University Nathan Toews, Dickinson College (PA)
Panel #2: Perspectives from Federal Ageh L,	





