Executive Summary
Military servicemembers on active duty benefit from extensive training that prepares them to perform in a range of occupations and professions. While some of these occupational specialties have direct or partial equivalents in the civilian workforce, transitioning servicemembers often lack the relevant civilian occupational credentials required under federal or state law, or by an employer, to secure employment. Thus, despite relevant skills and experience, veterans can encounter lengthy processes or burdensome requirements to obtain relevant civilian credentials for employment. This burdens not only veterans, who face additional time and financial costs, but also taxpayers, who pay both for the initial military training and for retraining through veterans’ federal education benefits.

While the federal government has undertaken initiatives to provide civilian credentials and identify equivalencies between military and civilian occupations, the ultimate authority for regulating entry into most professions lies with state governments. The nation’s governors recognize that authority and have made assisting veterans in transitioning from military service to civilian life and employment a priority. Between 2013 and 2015, 39 states issued executive orders or enacted legislation aimed at assisting veterans transfer their military skills to civilian employment. The findings presented in this report emerged from the authors’ direct engagement with states and a review of state project reports describing the state’s processes and strategies. The report is intended to serve as a blueprint for governors to inform their efforts to accelerate veterans’ licensing and certification.

Key Findings

Identifying the Relevant Barriers: State Acceleration Strategies are Shaped by Both Occupational and State Specific Complexities
Governors must identify the licensing and certification barriers facing veterans that are particular to their state and to each targeted occupation and then develop relevant strategies that address these barriers. The demonstration states identified several types of barriers commonly encountered by transitioning servicemembers and veterans that were shaped by both occupational and state-specific complexities. The
states then adopted strategies to address these barriers. In brief, the main barriers and strategies to address the barriers are highlighted in Figure 1 below.

**Design and Implement the Acceleration Strategy: Across Different Strategies, States can Follow a Common Process to Designing an Appropriate Strategy**

Although state strategies differed as a result of occupational and state-specific requirements, the demonstration experience surfaced a common process for designing and implementing strategies to accelerate the licensure and certification of veterans. (The steps that states commonly followed can be found on Figure 2 on page 3.)

Utilizing this implementation approach, demonstration states made progress on strategies across selected occupations. By the conclusion of the 18-month demonstration, five states—Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Nevada and Virginia—implemented policies allowing veterans to apply for licensure reciprocity, and three states Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin implemented policies allowing veterans to achieve licensure by examination. All six states engaged in the development of education bridge programs, three of which were operational by the close of the demonstration period. Five states—Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Nevada, and Wisconsin — put in place strategies to grant advanced standing to veterans in training programs, and three states—Minnesota, Virginia and Wisconsin — implemented strategies to streamline administrative rules and processes.

**Lessons Learned: Governors Have Several Tools at Their Disposal to Support the Implementation of an Acceleration Strategy**

As a result of the demonstration, states identified a set of lessons learned for governors to consider, which can

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**Figure 1. State Strategies to Address Common Barriers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>State Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veterans who have military training and experience equivalent to that of licensed civilians may find that civilian licensing boards are not accustomed to recognizing military documentation of their training and experience.</td>
<td>Recognize Equivalent Military Training and Experience States can assess the equivalency of military training courses and use official documentation to permit veterans with fully or partially equivalent training and experience to sit for civilian licensure examinations or license veterans by endorsement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans can experience significant gaps between their military training and civilian occupational requirements, meaning they may have to participate in duplicative training.</td>
<td>Provide Accelerated Training Opportunities States can work with educational institutions to set up accelerated programs for veterans that bridge gaps, provide veterans advanced standing in existing programs or offer bridge courses that prepare veterans to enter existing programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative rules and processes within civilian licensing and credentialing systems may create hurdles for veterans to obtain licensure or certification.</td>
<td>Streamline Administrative Processes and Rules States can assess any non-skill related requirements that might disadvantage veterans, such as fees or length of experience, or can make civilian employment pathways friendlier to veterans through outreach to both veterans and employers.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
advance the implementation of accelerated pathways:

- **Elevate the issue.** The governor's office is important to mobilize the number and diversity of state agencies involved and to take executive action and coordinate any required statutory changes with the state legislature.

- **Coordinate cross-agency action.** Given that responsibility for veterans' licensing and credentialing is dispersed across multiple state agencies, a key responsibility of governors is ensuring that agencies collaborate and understand their role in accelerating pathways for veterans.

- **Learn from others.** First, map innovations already under way at the local level with broader applicability across the states. The demonstration states also found that cross-state learning is important to discovering barriers to developing accelerated pathways and to identifying strategies to facilitate their implementation.

- **Secure buy-in from licensure boards and the postsecondary education system.** Close intra-state communication and collaboration between state licensing boards, on the one hand, and postsecondary educational institutions and their governing state education agencies, on the other hand, are critically important factors in successfully negotiating the operational details of designing and implementing accelerated pathways to licensure.

- **Leverage existing national resources.** National associations of state licensing boards can expedite state-level efforts by providing a foundation for designing occupation-specific curricula that support the implementation of accelerated pathways.

- **Harness data to inform decisions and make the case for change.** Demonstration states continue to struggle with the limited availability of state-level information on the military occupational specialties of transitioning servicemembers and recently separated veterans, which makes it difficult to estimate the level of demand for accelerated pathways for the different civilian occupations and to prioritize the occupations to be targeted for pathways.

## Introduction

Members of the United States' military are trained in hundreds of occupations with relevance to the civilian workforce. Ideally, veterans could turn their training and work experience into civilian jobs. However, many civilian occupations have regulated pathways for entry,
with few accessible mechanisms to recognize skills developed outside of these pathways. Some veterans find that, despite training and experience relevant to the civilian workforce, they must start from the beginning to obtain the formal documentation and training required to enter their occupation of choice. These administrative and duplicative training requirements can impose additional costs on veterans and taxpayers, who pay for both the initial training provided by the military and then for retraining outside of the military through veterans’ education and unemployment benefits.

Recognizing these challenges, the federal government has focused on several initiatives to accelerate civilian licensing and certification for veterans, including the Veterans Employment Initiative, the Joining Forces Military Spouse Licensing Initiative, the Department of Defense Credentialing Task and Licensing Force and the White House Forum on Military Credentialing and Licensing.

Although critical for elevating the importance of accelerating employment pathways for veterans, federal legislation can only go so far to help veterans transition to civilian employment. While federal agencies and national professional associations can propose standards and guidelines, state governments are the ultimate authority for regulating entry into most licensed professions. State licensing boards make final decisions about whether alternative pathways are adequate to uphold public safety standards based on professional requirements, occupational skill competencies and state laws and regulations. States encounter a range of challenges implementing these policies amid the complexity of state licensure and third-party certification systems. Governors and states are responding, through executive orders and legislation that directs licensing boards, by recognizing and awarding credit for veterans’ military training and experience.

**The Veterans’ Licensing and Credentialing Demonstration Project**

To help states accelerate these efforts, the Veterans’ Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 (VOW Act) authorized a demonstration project to engage governors in streamlining veterans’ credentialing and licensing. The Veterans’ Licensing and Credentialing Demonstration Project aimed to help states move from policy intent to the design and implementation of accelerated pathways to licensure and certification for veterans. The states participating in the demonstration project pursued that objective in the absence of any clear blueprint to guide their efforts. Building on their experience, this report aims to serve as a resource for other states planning to follow their lead.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) contracted with the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) to carry out the 18-month demonstration project. With the ultimate goal of identifying the most efficient process for moving veterans into civilian employment in high-growth, high-demand industries, DOL and the NGA Center developed a competitive process to select six states to participate in the 18-month demonstration—**Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Nevada, Virginia and Wisconsin.**

Each demonstration state selected up to three high-demand civilian occupations with clear linkages to pre-selected military occupational specialties (see Table 1 on page 5). Findings emerged from the authors’ direct engagement with states and review of state project reports describing the state’s processes and strategies.

In the initial phase of the project, the NGA Center and DOL selected military occupations that aligned with high-demand civilian occupations based on research, discussions with stakeholders and review of relevant occupational data. Furthermore, states applying to the demonstration had the option of proposing additional high-demand, licensed health occupations that required skills possessed by military medics. The three military occupations examined were:

- Medic (Army 68W, Navy Hospital Corpsman, Air Force 4N0X1);
- Police (Army 31B, Navy Master-At-Arms, Air
Force 3P0X1, Marine Corps 5811); and
- Truck Driver (Army 88M, Marine Corps 3531).

The six relevant licensed civilian professions identified as a part of this process were:

- Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)/Paramedic;
- Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN);
- Police Patrol Officer;
- Bus and Truck Driver;
- Registered Nurse (RN); and
- Physical Therapy Assistant (PTA).

During the second phase of the project, the NGA Center carried out the demonstration project as a policy academy, a model of technical assistance that engages a cohort of state teams to design and implement action plans to address the policy issue that is the focus of the policy academy. During the policy academy, states receive technical assistance, peer learning opportunities and access to national experts to inform their action plans. The veterans’ licensing and credentialing policy academy focused on building capacity within each state to implement and sustain strategies beyond the demonstration period, helping to organize the many experts and actors within the state toward a common goal. Key policy academy activities included: Two all-state policy academy meetings in Washington, D.C.; a series of webinars and conference calls on key topics; in-state site visits; and coaching calls and other forms of customized technical assistance tailored for each state.

### Identify Existing Barriers and Develop Strategies to Address Them

A number of factors can affect the ability of servicemembers and veterans to attain civilian credentials on a timely basis. Barriers are both specific to the occupation of interest and to a state’s policy and regulatory context. Demonstration states employed three types of strategies to support veterans’ transition to the civilian workforce, summarized in Figure 2 on page 6.

### Recognizing Equivalent Military Training and Experience

Civilian credentialing agencies have different eligibility requirements for attaining their credentials, typically including one of, or a combination of, required education and training, work experience...
or prerequisite credentials. Each of these eligibility requirements presents different challenges in terms of the ability of servicemembers and veterans to use their military training and experience to meet civilian credentialing requirements. In response, demonstration states designed and implemented strategies to promote the recognition of military training and experience in order to fulfill civilian credentialing requirements. These strategies were shaped by the extent to which military training and experience are fully or partially equivalent to civilian requirements. Among these strategies, there were two common approaches implemented by the demonstration states: licensure by endorsement and licensure by exam.

**Licensure by Endorsement**

States already commonly use endorsement when an individual holds a license in another state; therefore, if state licensing boards determine that there is full equivalency between military preparation and civilian preparation and work experience is substantially different from the types of documentation commonly recognized by civilian licensing boards. Among these strategies, there were two common approaches implemented by the demonstration states: licensure by endorsement and licensure by exam.

### Table 2. State Strategies to Accelerate Veterans’ Licensure and Certification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to Civilian Licensure/ Certification</th>
<th>Relevant State Strategies</th>
<th>Demonstration State Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For veterans with professional preparation equivalent to that of licensed civilians, the documentation of their military training and work experience is substantially different from the types of documentation commonly recognized by civilian licensing boards.</td>
<td>• License veterans with equivalent training by endorsement; and • Permit veterans with similar training to become licensed by passing an exam.</td>
<td>Iowa’s emergency medical services office reviewed training for military medics and approved it as sufficient for meeting the state’s emergency medical technician (EMT) training requirements. Former military medics with an active national EMT certification can apply for an EMT license in Iowa and in other states.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans who are unable to document the equivalency of their prior professional preparation may be required to attend training that is duplicative of their military training and experience.</td>
<td>• Develop bridge programs that prepare veterans to enter existing programs; and • Provide course credit and advanced standing in existing training or degree programs.</td>
<td>Nevada developed a curriculum for preparing medics to become LPNs. The curriculum reduces the training time by half. Wisconsin combined award of credit, bridge course development and entry to an existing program with advanced standing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative rules and processes create hurdles for veterans to obtain licensure or certification unrelated to their ability to competently provide professional services to the public.</td>
<td>• Assess non-skill related requirements to identify opportunities for streamlining; and • Assess the take-up on existing accelerated pathways for veterans to identify possible improvements.</td>
<td>Previously, Wisconsin required veterans to secure a law enforcement position before allowing them to take the law enforcement exam. Now, by allowing veterans to take the exam before receiving an employment offer, the exam can demonstrate their knowledge to potential employers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
preparation, veterans can be licensed by endorsement without additional training or exams. This is most appropriate for occupations for which there are recognized national certification exams. In New York, veterans who have proof of their military training as medics and who hold the current national certification for EMTs can be licensed through endorsement. This endorsement is an option for medics separating from military service with active EMT certifications, as well as for former medics whose certifications lapsed while the veterans were on active duty or within six months of their separation.

Among the demonstration states, Iowa’s emergency medical services office reviewed the training provided to medics and corpsmen and designated it an approved training program, allowing veterans with an active national EMT certification to apply for an Iowa EMT license without additional training or testing. Similarly, in Illinois, former medics with an active national EMT certification can apply for an Illinois EMT license. In Virginia, former medics with an active EMT certification also can apply for a state EMT license.

Licensure by Exam
If it is not appropriate for a state to award a license by endorsement, a state also may be able to waive the requirement for veterans to complete required civilian training programs as a prerequisite to take an exam or to simply allow veterans to sit for the exam based on military training and experience alone. In that case, states can use the exam to demonstrate that the candidate has sufficient knowledge to practice competently. Demonstration states benefited from examples of this strategy from California and West Virginia, which allow licensure by examination for military medics who pass the LPN exam.

Building on that experience, two demonstration states use the licensure by exam strategy for the law enforcement occupation. In Minnesota, former military police who meet experience requirements (four years or two years with a postsecondary degree) can apply to sit for a military reciprocity exam. Wisconsin’s law enforcement accelerated development program allows veterans who have separated within the past three years and who have at least one year of experience as a military police officer to take a reciprocity exam and become certified with no additional training.

Providing Accelerated Training Opportunities
When there is partial overlap between the skillset used in a military occupation and the skillset needed for a similar civilian occupation, states can provide shortened training opportunities for veterans that focus on filling specific gaps. Such strategies to develop accelerated opportunities in states include working with education providers to establish bridge programs designed specifically around veterans’ training needs, as well as by helping veterans waive required courses by awarding credit for military training or giving them advanced standing within an existing training program.

Bridge Programs
When it is determined that an accelerated training program would be effective in bridging the educational gaps veterans face, states can work with universities and community colleges to develop new programs or expand existing ones. Demonstration states benefited from an example at GateWay Community College in Arizona of a LPN training for former medics that reduces veterans’ training time from two to one semester, allowing veterans to sit for the state LPN licensure exam upon conclusion. While veterans can use their GI Bill education benefits to pay for such bridge programs, states may encounter regulations that restrict GI Bill beneficiary enrollment to 85 percent of total enrollment for an approved course in order to safeguard against predatory programs targeting veterans. However, as the GateWay Bridge program functions both as an accelerated training program for veterans and as a refresher course for civilian LPNs with lapsed licenses, it is able to accept GI Bill education benefits to serve veterans’ specific training needs.

Bridge programs were the most prevalent strategy demonstration states pursued, in some cases
developing new programs and in others identifying existing accelerated programs and making them more accessible to veterans. Illinois developed a veteran bridge program curriculum for LPNs and implemented the program at two community colleges, each of which will reduce the training time for medics by half. Nevada additionally established a bridge program for medics to become LPNs. Both Minnesota and Wisconsin identified and worked to adapt existing civilian bridge programs for veterans. In Minnesota, military medics can now take advantage of an existing program that accelerates training for civilian EMTs interested in becoming paramedics. In Wisconsin, the Vet2RN program adapted an existing LPN to RN pathway for medics who have the opportunity to accelerate progress towards an LPN license and continue to the RN level.

Course Credit and Advanced Standing
Another strategy to accelerate training is to provide academic credit for military training and work experience. In some cases, awarded credits become part of a post-military veterans’ academic transcript. In other cases, waiving course requirements can provide advanced standing in a training or degree program. Both processes can decrease the time it takes veterans to finish existing training programs to meet civilian licensure requirements.

To assist with that approach, the military provides various forms of official documentation of military training and experience that are similar in nature to the official academic transcripts that a civilian would submit from a civilian educational institution. While the Air Force operates the regionally accredited Community College of the Air Force, which documents military training and experience on a standard academic transcript, the other three services rely on the American Council on Education (ACE) to review their military training and experience to recommend appropriate amounts of academic credit. Based on ACE recommendations, the Joint Services Transcript (JST) documents the military training and occupational experience and makes academic credit recommendations.

In most cases, postsecondary educational institutions develop their own policies related to assessing prior learning and granting advanced standing in education programs. For example, Lansing Community College in Michigan awards course credit automatically for veterans with medic and corpsman training and allows veterans to earn more credits based on certification exams. These credits allow veterans to complete paramedic and RN programs at an accelerated pace. However, some states have legislation that directs boards of higher education to develop statewide prior learning policies for veterans. For example, the Ohio Board of Regents was required to develop uniform standards for prior learning credit at two- and four-year institutions and then train faculty and staff. All of Ohio’s public colleges and universities now meet the criteria for membership in Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, a national recognition program for schools that helps veterans maximize the number of transfer credits.

Demonstration states worked closely with postsecondary educational institutions to award credit and advanced standing to veterans with relevant military training and experience. In Minnesota, Lake Superior College awards course credit for required PTA courses to former military PTAs, reducing the credits needed for the degree from 27 credits to 20 credits. Wisconsin’s Herzing University now offers advanced standing for former medics entering the associate degree in nursing program. The medics join the program as second semester students and can take the NCLEX-PN exam after one semester or continue on to receive an associate degree in two semesters. Four of the demonstration states—Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin—now participate in the Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit led by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact. The collaborative will spend the next three years working to identify and address barriers for veterans to attain postsecondary credentials.
Streamlining Administrative Processes and Rules

Assess Non-Skill Related Requirements

Some requirements for civilian licensure are unrelated to an individual’s skills or knowledge, such as application fees and conditional offers of employment for public safety personnel. Throughout the demonstration, states identified opportunities to address administrative processes and regulations in ways that did not affect their substance, but reduced barriers for veterans looking to apply their military training experience within the civilian workforce. Examples of these strategies include waiving administrative fees, ensuring quick turnaround of applications, making information about the licensing process more accessible and aligning rules such as experience requirements with typical military service experiences.

Within the demonstration, Minnesota passed legislation to make it easier for veterans to take the police officer exam by changing work experience requirements from five years to four years to better reflect the typical length of military enlistments and tours of duty. Virginia conducted a veteran-specific assessment of the state’s performance measurement system in place for licensure applications in order to verify that veteran applications were being processed in a timely fashion. In Wisconsin, before taking the law enforcement exam, veterans were required to secure a conditional offer of employment. This type of conditional rule posed a challenge as law enforcement agencies had to offer employment to veteran candidates who lacked civilian law enforcement training or experience. Through an administrative change, the state now allows employers to endorse veterans to sit for the law enforcement exam and to offer employment on the basis of the candidates’ performance over the course of the training.

Design and Implement the Acceleration Strategy

During the demonstration, participating states designed and implemented a range of strategies to accelerate veterans’ transition to the civilian workforce. Although state strategies differed depending on occupational focus and state regulatory environments, a common process for designing and implementing these strategies emerged. This section describes that common process to offer a blueprint for policymakers from other states interested in pursuing similar efforts (see Figure 3 on page 10) that can support state policymakers by offering them a step-by-step process to inform the development of their own strategies.

Assemble a Team

Recognizing that no single state authority or agency is fully equipped to design and implement veterans’ licensure and certification strategies, demonstration states assembled cross-agency teams comprised of relevant stakeholders. Throughout the process, states discovered new partners and found that different partners rise in importance at certain points. The demonstration suggests the following partners are important to engage from the beginning:

- **Governor’s office.** The governor can make policy changes through orders to executive branch agencies and can carry weight with stakeholders in and out of state government. In turn, gubernatorial leadership is critical to the momentum and coordination of cross-agency efforts.

- **Workforce and economic development.** These agencies bring labor data and knowledge of the state’s workforce development infrastructure to the team. They also are positioned to conduct outreach with unemployed veterans and employers.

- **Postsecondary education.** New courses or programs require several layers of approval within the postsecondary education community. State postsecondary education authorities help the teams engage schools and identify existing programs that could serve as foundations for accelerated courses.
• **State veterans’ affairs agency.** These agencies hold comprehensive knowledge of state-specific veteran programs, data on states’ veteran populations, ties to the veteran service organization community and specialized capacity to market accelerated licensure pathways.

• **State licensing boards.** These agencies maintain detailed information about professional licensure requirements. At the outset of the project, state teams might not know on which occupations to focus. However, broad outreach to licensure boards can be useful at that stage to raise awareness of the issue and elicit preliminary responses from the boards.

• **State approving agency.** Every state has a state approving agency that determines whether a training or education program is eligible for GI Bill education benefits. It is important for state teams to work with the state approving agency from the beginning of the process to make sure that any new training program developed for veterans meets the approving agency’s requirements. Without that approval, veterans will not be able to take advantage of their GI Bill education benefits for the new program.

In some states, executive orders or legislation designated a lead partner to coordinate and set a timeline for beginning the work. For example, Illinois entered the demonstration project with an executive order in place designating the state’s department of veterans affairs as a lead on civilian employment for
veterans. The executive order or legislation also typically sets a timeline for identifying occupations and posting online assessments of gaps between military and civilian training.

**Select the Occupations**

Given the scope of the overlap between military and civilian occupations, the demonstration showed the value of placing a priority on specific occupations. Focusing on available opportunities and with a goal of having as significant an impact on facilitating the seamless transition of veterans into civilian employment as possible, demonstration states developed strategies for occupations that are both high-demand and high-density. To inform these choices, demonstration states used state labor market information and federal data to select their occupational focuses. The demonstration also targeted civilian occupations for which a high-density of active duty servicemembers hold a related military occupational specialty or code (MOC).

While the military did provide a list of the ten most common MOCs in 2011, none of the branches of the military make available or regularly provide information on the number of servicemembers holding a specific MOC to the states. That lack of information complicated state efforts to focus on high-density occupations. An additional challenge existed. States receive copies of separating servicemembers DD214 records, which describe their military history, MOC and discharge status. However, the process for designating the state to which a given servicemember’s form is provided does not guarantee that the record will reach the state in which the veteran resides following separation. In addition, the DD214s provided to states are largely paper-based, thus complicating the feasibility of any large-scale analysis of MOC density across the state veteran population.

In the absence of a source of up-to-date information at the state level, demonstration states initiated a joint request to the Department of Defense’s (DOD) Manpower Data Center to gather more recent information on the MOC-specific distribution of recently separated servicemembers associated with each of the six demonstration states, which affirmed the states’ strategies to focus on high-density occupations. Such data were also important to communicate the potential demand for accelerated pathways to licensing boards, and the need to create these pathways within educational institutions.

Despite these challenges, several demonstration states launched efforts to enhance access and use of available DD214s to inform and guide their strategies. For example, Wisconsin began organizing DD214s by MOC and then developed a memorandum of understanding between the Wisconsin Departments of Veterans Affairs and of Workforce Development to determine how many individuals (in aggregate) with MOC relevant to target occupations receive unemployment benefits in the state. In Minnesota, the state’s department of veterans affairs and the department of employment and economic development entered into a similar data-sharing agreement to map veteran unemployment by MOC. That information proved helpful, not only for estimating the MOC density of the veteran population in the state, but also for assessing the relative demand for accelerated employment pathways by occupation.

**Understand Civilian Employment Requirements and Stakeholders**

Demonstration states documented the existing pathways to licensure and certification within their selected occupations. That documentation of the existing pathways for the benefit of stakeholders facilitates an understanding of all the steps required for these pathways and makes it possible to identify the barriers that might emerge for veterans. That clear understanding of key technical details within these pathways in turn guides state strategies.

For example, the demonstration states identified a key distinction between licensure requirements that mandate participation in a state-approved training program...
versus those that mandate participation in an accredited training program. On the one hand, if completion of a state-approved program is required, the state licensing board is in a position to assess and approve the military training. On the other hand, if a state requires completion of an accredited training program, the state licensing board cannot on its own affect the acceptability of non-accredited military training since accreditation is the domain of a national authority.

Mapping civilian pathways to uncover such distinctions proved important in the formulation and subsequent implementation of state strategies. For example, in cases where state licensing boards were in a position to deem military training a state-approved program, boards had to assess the comparability of the training for the military occupation with the state’s approved training for the corresponding civilian occupation. Boards in some demonstration states cited staff capacity challenges given the volume and unfamiliarity of the military training documentation to be assessed. For occupations where completing a nationally accredited training program was a prerequisite for civilian licensure, state boards were in a position to use resources developed, for example, by national associations of state licensing boards to help perform a comparability assessment.

The mapping process also helps states identify any existing accelerated pathways to licensure that might be relevant to veterans, including endorsement and exam policies for individuals licensed out-of-state. States might also find that there are accelerated options for individuals with lapsed credentials. Existing accelerated pathways can serve as useful models or examples to adapt for veterans’ training and experience and to engage the state licensing boards and other stakeholders in the design of the acceleration strategies.

**Understand Military Occupational Specialties**

Once a relevant civilian pathway is identified and understood, states can help stakeholders understand the occupational relevancy of military training and practice. The state participants in the demonstration found that they could play a key translational role by communicating the details of military occupation descriptions to both state licensing and accrediting bodies and postsecondary educational institutions. This translational role included generating lists of MOC that were relevant to specific civilian occupations, reviewing military training materials and reviewing course credit recommendations for postsecondary educational institutions. To understand the relevant MOC, demonstration states followed similar processes to:

- **Identify all relevant MOC.** An MOC identifies an occupational category in the military and is a proxy for military training and experience. Members of the military are given a basic MOC, and many obtain additional identifiers throughout their careers to indicate further training and specialization. Each branch is likely to have several relevant MOCs for any given civilian job, making it complex and cumbersome for a state to take on all potential pathways to a given civilian occupation. To simplify this task, the demonstration states worked to identify the most common and relevant MOC in their veteran population. As a result of this step, states benefited from existing resources created by the military and the federal government that map MOC to civilian occupations.

- **Obtain relevant programs of instruction.** Once a specific subset of MOC is selected, the military service branches can provide more information about training requirements for that MOC. Information obtained from the military includes the specific job description, the curriculum for the training (also called the program of instruction [POI]), the length of training and the civilian credentials required. The gathering of information for review by civilian licensing boards is an important part of the process to prepare states to make final decisions about whether there are any equivalencies between the civilian job and the training and experience behind any given MOC. In demonstration states,
some of the licensing boards requested and reviewed detailed information about the content of each military course for the occupations identified in this project before making any decisions about accelerated pathways. To prepare for the licensing boards’ requests and rapidly implement the demonstration, the states gathered content and skill requirements at the beginning of the process for both the military and civilian sides. In some situations, the states gathered that information themselves, and in others, the states had their licensing boards directly obtain these materials from the military, accreditation boards and national professional associations. Some national professional associations also developed comparisons of such occupations and can provide copies of the POI. For example, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing obtained POIs for relevant medical professions and published a comparison to national nursing standards. All demonstration states found that process to be a useful resource for designing their respective LPN strategies.

- **Review awarded credits and credit recommendations.** As indicated above, most Air Force veterans will have Community College of the Air Force transcripts and some will hold associate degrees. In addition, Air Force veterans may have transcripts documenting credits earned at other postsecondary institutions. For Army, Navy and Marine Corps veterans, the JST will provide ACE credit recommendations for some military training and work experience. Veterans of these services may also have transcripts from civilian postsecondary institutions documenting credits and degrees earned from these schools on a voluntary basis. There also may be postsecondary institutions within the state that already have processes for awarding credit for military training and experience, as the basis for waiving some required courses. Credits awarded allow veterans to start further along the path to licensure instead of at the beginning and credit recommendations provide information about the equivalence of their military training and work experience.

**Produce Gap Analysis to Identify the Appropriate Strategy**

Equipped with an understanding of both civilian pathways and military training, states can produce a gap analysis that compares the skills and credentials held by servicemembers in a particular Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) to civilian requirements for state licensure and certification. Gap analyses also identify the appropriate strategy, whether it is overcoming documentation issues, providing accelerated training opportunities or streamlining administrative processes. Demonstration experience indicates that producing a complete gap analysis requires specialized knowledge of the occupation in question, which demands engagement of state licensing boards. To produce a gap analysis for each occupation, states can:

- **Scan for existing national analyses.** If a national professional association has already completed a comparison, it can serve as a basis for the state’s gap analysis. For example, demonstration states used the gap analysis from the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (see “the National Council of State Boards of Nursing Gap Analysis” box on page 14). National analyses can provide a template for states, but licensing boards in demonstration states still preferred to undertake their own additional assessments because of the potential for additional state-specific requirements. Although national professional associations develop standards, these are voluntarily adopted and often modified by states.

- **Engage licensing boards.** Licensing boards have the authority to designate an alternative course of training as an acceptable proxy for required state training, and they have unique technical knowledge of the skills and training necessary to meet state requirements for an occupation. That expertise and authority puts
licensing boards in a unique position to initiate a gap analysis, and several states issued executive orders directing licensing boards to develop accelerated licensure pathways for veterans.\textsuperscript{22} For example, Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval used an executive order to direct state licensure boards to develop new programs for reciprocity agreements and bridged the gap between state-required experience and military experience. The executive order specifically addressed boards overseeing emergency medical services, licensed practical nurses and law enforcement professionals.\textsuperscript{23} Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed an executive order that required state agencies to identify equivalencies and gaps between military and civilian occupations and to develop recommendations for licensing boards that would take military training into account for awarding civilian licenses.\textsuperscript{24} That determination helps states identify the appropriate strategy for streamlining licensure and certification for veterans in that occupation.

In cases where full equivalency exists, state strategies can focus on overcoming other barriers to veterans’ licensing and certification. Such strategies include overcoming documentation and licensing barriers for veterans through endorsement of military training or waiving the training requirement for veterans with similar training and experience to sit for licensing exams. Overcoming administrative barriers to achieve full equivalency includes paying for exam fees or giving licensure credit for non-skill state requirements such as the duration of previous experience.

For occupations where gap analyses indicate partial equivalency is possible, appropriate state strategies focus on providing accelerated training programs that help bridge specific gaps and avoid duplicative training. These strategies include developing standalone bridge courses that veterans can complete to meet state requirements or providing course credit or advanced standing in existing training programs, so veterans complete only the course they need to be eligible

\textbf{Full & Partial Equivalency Strategies}

The results of the gap analysis determine whether military training and experience for the occupation in question is fully or partially equivalent to a state’s training requirements for licensure or certification.
for state licensure. All partial-equivalency strategies require engagement with postsecondary educational institutions either to modify student outreach, curriculum or course content policies or to develop, approve and deliver accelerated courses for veterans. Demonstration states followed a similar process to engage postsecondary educational institutions in these strategies:

- **Target outreach to veteran-friendly education partners.** Demonstration states saw value in engaging training partners with high populations of adult learners such as community colleges, many of which operate support networks and centers devoted to veteran students. The Servicemembers Opportunity Consortium works in cooperation with the DOD to recognize schools with veteran-friendly policies.25

- **Provide implementation support to education partners.** Across states that pursued the bridge course strategy, whether a new course or an existing course, state teams provided technical assistance to the postsecondary institutions. That assistance included developing the course curriculum and guiding the review and approval of the curriculum through a multi-layered process. The multi-layer approval process may include faculty, institutional boards, accreditation bodies, state higher education boards, state licensing boards and the state approving agency. Two demonstration states provided small start-up grants to support education partners in the development of new bridge courses.

### Market to Veterans

Given the need to identify and recruit veterans to the accelerated pathways, the demonstration states emphasized the importance of developing a marketing plan for eligible transitioning servicemembers and veterans. Such an emphasis is important to address any initial concerns among licensing and training partners about the level of demand for these accelerated pathways. State teams in the demonstration agreed to support partners by taking steps to market the programs to help increase the pool of applicants.

States can identify the communication touch points with veterans for outreach and recruitment purposes, whether through state departments of veterans’ services or the public workforce system, which administers the delivery of unemployment compensation for veterans and nonveterans. While broad-based outreach through branding accelerated pathways may be one option, states can also update websites and conduct grassroots outreach through community and veteran service organizations. Some states also use data for more targeted outreach.

State teams from Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin organized agency-held DD214s by MOC and implemented letter-writing campaigns with information about accelerated pathways to licensure to those potential applicants. Since DD214s do not always include the current addresses of veterans, the Wisconsin team developed a memorandum of understanding with the state Department of Revenue to help identify accurate addresses for veterans. States also established mechanisms to share data among agencies. The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs began marketing accelerated pathways to veterans through a database maintained by the Illinois Department of Employment Security. Wisconsin partnered with the state Department of Military Affairs to conduct targeted outreach to servicemembers holding a relevant MOC stationed in the state.

### Develop Assessment Plan

As states design and implement strategies to accelerate licensing and certification paths for veterans, building data collection capacity also enables states to assess progress and signals the need for adjustments or improvements to new accelerated pathways to licensure. Furthermore, establishing bridge programs and data collection partnerships give the state agencies much needed baselines on veteran licensures and certifications. State teams also can position themselves to assess the potential contributions of accelerated
pathways to helping veterans transition to the civilian workforce.

Over the course of the demonstration, the state teams made progress on both fronts. For example, Illinois’ agreement with the two postsecondary intuitions focused on implementing bridge courses for veterans and asking the host schools to monitor and report data on bridge course enrollment, completion and subsequent employment. The Wisconsin team structured a similar agreement to assess the progress of the accelerated courses hosted by partner educational institutions. The teams from Minnesota and Wisconsin also established reporting agreements to track veterans’ use of exam waivers and pass rates for police patrol officers.

Data partnerships among state agencies can work to help develop baselines for veterans’ licensure and certification from a performance management perspective. Virginia’s department of health professions, which licenses LPNs and PTAs, worked with its healthcare workforce data center to collect information during the license application and license renewal processes. Using this approach positions states to set a baseline and track the distribution of veterans across the licensed health care workforce. Similarly, Nevada Governor Sandoval issued Executive Order 2014-20, which requires state licensing boards to collect information on veteran status and to report that information to the state’s interagency council on veterans affairs. States that build data collection and reporting capacity in conjunction with the development of accelerated pathways have the ability to assess the progress and success of these strategies beyond the performance period of the demonstration.

Lessons Learned: Implications for Governors

As a consequence of the demonstration project, states identified a number of lessons learned based upon their challenges and successes in implementing their strategies. That guidance makes a difference in the implementation of the process and strategies as described in the previous sections and serves as guideposts for other states interested in accelerating veteran’s licensure. Although all of the states made progress in their respective strategies, their efforts to overcome persistent barriers will continue beyond the demonstration phase. These six important lessons, gathered from the experience of the demonstration states, will help other governors assess readiness and anticipate potential challenges for implementing accelerated pathways for veterans.

Elevate the Issue

Governors can elevate veterans’ employment as part of a statewide agenda, rendering it a priority across agencies, and can promote constructive cross-agency partnerships. Furthermore, prominent actions like issuing executive orders can catalyze changes across a state. States indicated that legislation and executive orders directing licensing boards to award credit for military training and experience were most effective when they focused on specific occupations. For example, legislation in Arizona specifically required the state’s nursing board to identify accelerated options for veterans. That created an incentive for a community college to propose development of a bridge program for LPNs, as well as an incentive for the nursing board to collaborate with that community college. Accordingly, the nursing board pre-approved the program at the conceptual stage and approved the final curriculum that was developed within a year of the legislation passing. In Illinois, the governor signed an executive order that designated the Department of Veterans’ Affairs as the lead agency for providing a specific timeline for identifying gaps between military and civilian licensed occupations. In both cases, the specificity of the law and executive order made it easier for both governors to hold stakeholders accountable.

Coordinate Cross-Agency Action

Given that demonstration states struggled to make progress on accelerated pathways for veterans without the full support of licensing boards and postsecondary institutions, a key role for governors is to coordinate the partnerships necessary to successfully implement pathways for veterans. In demonstration states,
representatives from the governor’s office either led the state’s team or worked closely with the team leader. That type of leadership helped to keep the various stakeholders engaged throughout the lengthy processes described above. It also helped to engage the necessary state agencies and stakeholders to implement state strategies.

For example, an important cross-agency partnership for advancing state strategies was between state licensing boards and postsecondary educational institutions. State licensing boards and educational institutions have existing, complementary responsibilities for developing and approving education and training programs that lead to licensure for civilian workers. As a result, the support of both is critical as neither constituency has complete authority to develop and implement an accelerated pathway on its own.

**Learn From Others**
The demonstration states benefited from existing examples of accelerated pathways. These existing programs helped inform dialogue about the feasibility of state strategies with state licensing boards and postsecondary institutions. States also indicated that having examples of fully realized programs helped accelerate the development and implementation of their own accelerated pathways. Specifically, at the beginning of the demonstration, the GateWay Community College in Phoenix, Arizona had just completed the process of developing and gaining state licensing board approval for an accelerated LPN pathway for veterans, based on the NCSBN gap analysis. Four demonstration states consulted directly with the director of the GateWay program. In the end, two demonstration states adopted the GateWay model as the model for their accelerated LPN programs.

**Secure Buy-In From Licensure Boards and the Postsecondary Education System**
Buy-in from critical stakeholders ensures sustainable success of accelerated programs. For many of the stakeholders, veterans’ employment is not their primary mission even though these stakeholders are vital to making real changes. It is worth noting that in some cases the lack of engagement can result from a lack of capacity within licensing boards and education partners, making it difficult for licensing board and education leaders to devote resources or develop the capacity to accelerate pathways for veterans. States indicated that engagement from the governor’s office helped encourage decision makers in these institutions pursue this work.

States also indicated that postsecondary institutions are reluctant to establish bridge programs for veterans unless a demonstrable level of demand is likely from eligible participants to ensure programs are financially sustainable. To respond to that concern, states offered support in the form of marketing for postsecondary institutions to build awareness and generate interest among veterans.

**Leverage Existing National Resources**
Utilizing existing resources can help start a conversation with stakeholders, jump-start the process of developing accelerated opportunities for veterans or shorten the time to full implementation. States were able to use existing assessments of the gaps between military and civilian training completed by national associations of state licensing boards. For example, the report by NCSBN provided the states with a foundation and a template for developing accelerated pathways. That organization compared a standard civilian curriculum for the LPN occupation with the training curricula for four different categories of Army, Navy and Air Force Medics, identifying for each civilian curriculum element the extent to which the four military curricula met the civilian standard. All six demonstration states targeted the development of accelerated pathways to LPN, and although state licensing boards do not implement pathways based on these national assessments alone, such assessments can serve to facilitate implementation, making it easier for the states to engage licensing boards with a tangible example and a starting point.

Demonstration states targeted all institutions of higher education that provide education and training...
services to meet the needs of veterans and focused on them as potential partners for accelerated pathways. As referenced earlier, the demonstration states used the Servicemembers Opportunity Consortium to identify schools with veteran-friendly policies. States additionally used the American Council on Education’s “Toolkit for Veteran Friendly Institutions” to identify institutions of higher education.

Harness Data to Inform Decisions and Make the Case for Change

Information about the potential demand for accelerated pathways can serve as a powerful tool to motivate leaders in other organizations and to initiate policy change. States, however, encountered several barriers to harnessing that information. Various federal and state agencies hold up-to-date and accurate information on state veteran populations, which presents states with the problem of how to share data systematically. That lack of consistent information may include data storage barriers, such as information in the paper-based DD214. States also struggled to assess and communicate the need for accelerated processes for a particular occupation and conduct targeted outreach to veterans eligible to participate in newly established licensure and certification pathways.

While gathering such data can often prove difficult for states, the demonstration states’ experience highlighted several opportunities available to governors to tackle the barriers. Notably, some states initiated cross-agency data sharing agreements and established new reporting requirements to confront these challenges over the course of the demonstration. Of particular importance is the ability to collect data to monitor participation of veterans in pathways that contribute to veterans’ licensure and employment.

Marketing new programs and opportunities to veterans requires data. States indicated that some veterans leaving the military have expectations for salaries, benefits and career advancement that are hard to meet in the civilian workforce. Therefore, when policymakers are assessing a civilian occupation, they will benefit from understanding the extent to which that occupation is likely to support a standard of living at least on par with military service. An example, while emergency medical skill at the EMT level sufficiently supports an adequate standard of living while in the military, emergency medical skill at a (higher) paramedic level is required to command civilian pay and benefits that are comparable to those of a military EMT.

Conclusion

As the demonstration states confirmed, governors play a major role in accelerating pathways for veterans’ entry into the workforce. States participating in the demonstration project took steps to identify the skills veterans earned in the military, translate them in a way that civilian licensure boards will accept and help veterans take advantage of accelerated pathways for civilian licenses. To transition to the civilian workforce, states identified opportunities to waive tests and training and created new courses to fill skills gaps without requiring veterans to undergo duplicative training.

The demonstration states’ collective experiences provide learning opportunities for other states interested in using legislation or executive orders to create accelerated pathways and to implement strategies for licensure and certifications for veterans. While there is no standard solution for states to create accelerated pathways for veterans, as licensing and certification strategies are often state- and occupation-specific, the experiences from this demonstration offer states strategies that correspond to the specific barriers or requirements that veterans might encounter. These strategies include documenting veterans’ skills, filling training gaps and removing administrative requirements without jeopardizing public safety.

The Veterans Licensing and Credentialing Demonstration project established that no single entity or agency has the full range of information and capacity to create accelerated pathways. States looking to implement these strategies should consider...
this observation. Both the technical knowledge needed to identify strategies and the authority to make changes spread across multiple agencies and sectors, highlighting the need for a strong partnership to coordinate change. Vital to the process, communication supports licensure and certification for veterans among state agencies, the federal government, the military, educational institutions and the private sector. Demonstration states relied on their partners for the information needed to identify and implement strategies and to deliver the right information to veterans. Against that backdrop, the cross-agency and stakeholder teams led by staff from the governor’s office, assembled at the beginning of the demonstration, helped sustain progress to serve the nation’s transitioning servicemembers and veterans.

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Endnotes

1 Participating states hereinafter are referred to as “demonstration states.”
2 Ibid.
5 Medic to CNA was evaluated by Illinois and found to be equivalent. See Illinois.gov, Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs, “Current Military Training Equivalencies – For Veterans,” [https://www.illinois.gov/veterans/programs/Pages/StateLicensesMilitaryTraining.aspx](https://www.illinois.gov/veterans/programs/Pages/StateLicensesMilitaryTraining.aspx) (accessed August 1, 2016). Army nurse to LPN was evaluated by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing in the gap analysis cited above.
18 To identify the targeted occupations, it was necessary for demonstration state teams to become familiar with the standard terminology for referring to military occupations across the military services and within DOD. The services have their own terminology for referring to military occupations. For the Army and Marine Corps, the standard term is Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). For the Air Force, the standard term is Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC), and for the Navy, the standard term is Rating. Within DOD, the term Military Occupation Code (MOC) is used to refer to the military occupations across all services. Accordingly, that term and acronym has been adopted for the remainder of this report to apply to military occupations across the services.
19 Copy 6 of the DD 214 is sent to the state veterans affairs agency designated by the separating servicemember. It may or may not be sent to the state in which the veteran resides upon separation, or in which the veteran currently resides.
20 Army COOL ([https://www.cool.army.mil/](https://www.cool.army.mil/)) and Navy COOL ([https://www.cool.navy.mil/index.html](https://www.cool.navy.mil/index.html)) are official military websites that help servicemembers, veterans, career and transition counselors, military recruiters, employers and credentialing boards identify the civilian certification and license requirements that relate to the MOS of interest. These two websites also provide links to numerous resources to help soldiers meet these requirements.