

**Strategies for Gaining Insight to the Employment Challenges  
of Veterans with Disabilities**

**Final Report to the Bob Woodruff Foundation**

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## Introduction

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In an effort to explore the continued challenges faced by post-9/11 veterans with disabilities as they transition from military service back to their home communities, the Cornell University *K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability* (YTI), with grant support from The Bob Woodruff Foundation, convened a series of focus groups with a critical lens on employment challenges and opportunities in the civilian workforce. The purpose of the focus group sessions was to gain understanding of and insight into the issues and personal perspectives of three distinct groups: veterans with disabilities, family members, and employers that hire and/or are interested in hiring veterans, with special concentration on those with disabilities. Focus groups for family members were supplemented by surveys in order to increase participation by individuals who were not able to attend an in-person meeting.

While a series of questions were developed in advance and presented at the start of each session, the discussions were left open to encourage the flow of ideas and let the conversation evolve as participants shared their experiences and perspectives. A robust recruitment effort led to invitations emailed to a limited number of potential attendees to keep groups small to facilitate maximum participation and interaction. Geographic locations were selected based on the availability of veterans, with California, Texas, and New York comprising three of the top five states for veteran population. Upon request from a federal agency in Albuquerque, NM, an additional site was added with permission by The Bob Woodruff Foundation. Federal agencies have special initiatives and hiring authorities for people with disabilities and veterans and this meeting offered a unique opportunity to examine how employment of these select populations is promoted.

## Recruitment

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A comprehensive recruitment strategy was implemented to ensure maximum reach and participation. The following list describes the tactics executed. Samples of recruitment materials are included in Appendix I.

1. E-blasts were sent to the over 1800 subscribers to the Yang-Tan mailing list.
2. Links to information about the sessions were included in postings to the Yang-Tan Facebook page and Twitter feed. Project team also shared these Facebook and Twitter posts to their personal social media.
3. Project team members sent personal emails to selected individual networks. This effort led to additional communication to more than 85 representatives of major veterans' organizations, service agencies, and employers. The team also asked personal networks to forward information as appropriate.

4. State U.S. Department of Labor's Veteran Employment & Training Service (DOL VETS) contacts, Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) coordinators, and any corresponding Veterans Economic Community representatives in the State and local areas were informed, with a request to forward recruitment information to constituents.
5. Emails were sent to Student Veterans of America chapter advisors and student leaders for all chapters within an approximate 90-minute driving distance of each focus group meeting place. Included in the email invitation was a copy of the recruitment flyer, information about the project, and a request to pass on the information to applicable internal networks.
6. VET centers in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut were contacted with recruitment information.
7. For the recruitment of family members, information was sent to The Elizabeth Dole Foundation for dissemination to their Caregiver Community Program.
8. Emails or faxes were sent to organizations in each region with a focus on veterans: e.g. Local chapters of Disabled American Veterans, New Directions for Vets, Goodwill, Americare, Silhouettes for Vets, US VETS Inc., Helmets to Hardhats, Jobs to Build On, Grace After Fire, and more.

All recipients were asked to forward the information about the sessions to others who may be eligible and interested.

### **Employer Focus Groups**

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A total of four employer sessions were convened in the following locations: New York City, NY; San Antonio, TX; Los Angeles, CA; and Albuquerque, NM. The latter was added upon request from a local consultant who served as HR Director for the US Forest Service for many years before his retirement. Since Albuquerque has a high concentration of federal agencies, the addition of this site allowed us to garner a more complete employer perspective as veterans currently represent slightly more than 30% of the federal workforce, according to the Office of Personnel Management.

In all, 47 business representatives participated in the four employer sessions. Of these, 74.3% of participants had a direct connection to the military, with 51.4% identifying as veterans and 22.9% as a military spouse or family member. The remaining one-quarter of participants (25.7%) had no personal connection to the military. Employers in attendance in New York City, San Antonio, and Los Angeles included nonprofit organizations, federal contractors, and small business, representing industries such as human services, IT, manufacturing, defense and logistics, energy, finance, insurance, engineering, and higher education. The Albuquerque

session was attended by representatives of six federal agencies, five New Mexico state agencies, and four veterans support groups.

Each employer session started with an introduction to The Bob Woodruff Foundation and the purpose of the grant. To ensure that participants felt comfortable speaking freely and without reservation, it was stated up front that sessions would not be taped, nor would attribution be given to any particular comment. Sessions lasted approximately three hours, and all meetings ended with most participants wanting to talk more. At each meeting, all participants expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to come together to share ideas and strategies.

Employer focus group sessions evolved organically, with discussions revolving around the following general topics: recruitment and retention; disability and self-identification; on-the-job support; and company culture. Each session ended with a final question seeking general advice/recommendations for other employers and job-seeking veterans. Sessions have been summarized according to the following categories: continued barriers to an effective transition to work; an inventory of what is working; advice and recommendations for future initiatives; and a list of recommended resources.

#### *Continued Barriers to an Effective Transition to Work*

A lively discussion ensued concerning continued barriers to employment, as seen through the eyes of employers. Since most representatives in the employer focus group sessions were connected to the military, they came to the table with an understanding of the “soft skills” Veterans typically bring to the workforce. However, participants frequently mentioned a critical (hard) skills gap, specifically with regard to information technology and computer proficiency. There was common belief that unless a service member had an occupational specialty in the trades (e.g., mechanic, etc.), he/she was likely at a significant disadvantage in transitioning to the civilian workforce. Related to this notion was an additional gap in credentialing and obtaining the high-demand certifications that would allow veterans to be more competitive alongside non-military-connected job seekers. There was also consensus that most veterans experience a great deal of difficulty marketing or branding themselves and their skills to employers, which also puts them at a disadvantage.

Issues of homelessness (for both male and female veterans), the need for more affordable housing, and a deficiency in financial literacy were all noted by employers as continued barriers. Some employers spoke from experience of situations where background checks associated with credit issues prevented a qualified veteran from obtaining employment. The fact that dependable and safe housing, especially for those veterans with families, was necessary for employment success was also noted.

Employers spoke often of disparate organizational efforts, especially related to an understanding of military culture and mentorship. While those with military experience were able to help bridge some of the gaps, it was observed that there continues to be a significant lack of understanding of how military roles and experiences translate to transferable skills for many work environments, especially those requiring leadership roles. Employers also remarked about the presence of a culture divide stemming from a lack of understanding of military roles and difficulties translating and matching civilian occupational skill sets. In efforts to prepare veterans for the transition to the civilian workforce, employers (most of whom provided informal mentorship on the side) noted a significant lack of mentorship within many organizations, as well as a recognition that “brutal honesty” was a necessary component to any effective mentoring activity.

Finally, it was observed by all participants that separating from military service, especially with an acquired injury or disability, creates a significant loss of identity, which tends to produce a sense of confusion and frustration for those trying to adjust. Employment laws focused on self-identification of disability status were noted to add to increased stigma and stereotyping, both self-imposed by the veteran and on the part of the organization.

#### *What Works*

Employer focus group attendees were able to readily identify specific actions they believed were helping to “move the needle” with regard to improving veteran employment outcomes, especially for veterans with disabilities. Actions noted at both the organizational and individual levels embraced the overarching themes of partnership, communication, and what was referred to as *E3*: educate, empower, and execute.

With regard to hiring, retention, and promotion, the group identified a number of proactive strategies. Purposeful mentoring (both veteran-to-veteran and civilian-to-veteran), career monitoring, and teams dedicated to veteran hiring and “fit” were all cited as actions that have led to tangible improvements in the workplace. While affecting job retention continues to be a challenge, most employer representatives were able to describe specific instances, albeit anecdotal, where proactive strategies made a significant difference in their workplace. Many of these strategies promoted a “retention starts the first day of hire” mindset, which was noted to be critical for veteran engagement and was identified as a vital piece of the retention puzzle. This strategy could be easily folded into veteran-focused onboarding programs. Employers also indicated that providing up-front support during the hiring process tended to lead to better working relationships and employment outcomes.

Additional strategies for improving employee engagement and retention included employer appreciation of military service with executive breakfasts, photos with and



recognition by the CEO, and disseminating challenge coins to those who have served. Many in the group noted that each time one of these activities took place, additional employees would come forth and self-identify as a veteran. Some employers mentioned celebrating Veteran's Day by encouraging veterans to come dressed for work in uniform to increase awareness and discussion about military service. Employee Resource Groups (also known as ERGs, affinity groups, or network groups) are established and convened by many employers to allow employees to gather in a work setting based on shared characteristics or life experiences. While ERGs can be formal or informal, most formal groups are supported by organizational executive sponsorship. ERGs were noted to be helpful for building camaraderie, enhancing communication, and providing an avenue to connect to something worthwhile and purposeful.

Finally, for those in attendance who were federal contractors, a focus on encouraging sub-contractors and vendors to hire veterans was noted as critical – not only to comply with federal regulations, but for demonstrating good faith efforts.

#### *Recommendations for Future Initiatives*

Employers in the focus groups offered advice and recommendations to veterans seeking employment and employers interested in attracting veterans.

Specific recommendations included:

- identifying mentors, both veteran and civilian, to support the transition and integration of new hires and increase the likelihood of job retention and career development;
- creating and expanding opportunities for work-based experiences, such as paid internships and/or job shadowing;
- developing and delivering cultural competency education for hiring managers, recruiter, and community members;
- holding industry/business-led transition boot-camp/re-careering workshops;
- exploring the substitution of military experience for education/degree, as appropriate and when possible.

Federal employers were encouraged to use position classification standards and the Schedule A Hiring Authority for qualified veterans with targeted disabilities.

Recommendations for veterans included:

- identifying and seeking out work with purpose and mission;
- researching and reaching out to Employee Resource Groups from companies of interest during the pre- and post-employment process;

- preparing an exit strategy for leaving the military, no less than six months to a year before transition;
- finding a trusted and knowledgeable supporter to include on the "transition journey";
- engaging in purposeful networking;
- seeking out headhunters, requesting assistance to guide a targeted job search, and narrowing down this search to jobs of interest;
- participating in practice interviews to rehearse appropriate, non-military language and suitable attire.

It is important to note that organizational culture and environment were consistently identified by employers as equally important for veterans to consider when determining if their skills are a good fit for a particular position.

### *Recommended Resources*

Employers were not shy about promoting what they have experienced as effective resources, both from personal and professional experiences. The organizations identified by participating employers are listed below:

- State/local area employment collaboratives, e.g., MilCityUSA, TX Veterans Commission
- Flat Iron School (IT program)
- Talent ABQ (Albuquerque)
- Schedule A hiring process (federal)
- Sail Ahead (Long Island)
- Veterans Village (LA)
- Northrop Grumman's Network of Champions comprised of 100 companies
- Rally Point Six
- Industry and employer-focused transition programs, such as USAA's VetFIT (Veterans for I.T.) and Combat to Claims
- Running Mate/Battle Buddy Mentoring at Qualcomm
- Four Block Peer Mentoring
- Veterans on Wall Street
- Boeing's Corporate Integration for Warriors
- Marine Career Monitors
- Hire Heroes USA
- PWC's Direct Transitional Pathway for IT and the "Home Grown" program

- Jacobs Engineering’s Career Pathing – The Jump Start Program (Clear line of Career Sight)
- Psych Armor
- Mayor’s Office for Veterans
- Joint Services Transcript

### **Veteran Focus Groups**

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Three veteran sessions were convened: one in San Antonio, TX and two in the Los Angeles, CA area. Despite an aggressive recruitment strategy and strong ties in the New York City area, the project team was unable to assemble a veteran focus group for an in-person meeting. While interest was expressed by many, registrations simply did not follow. To ensure that the expected three veteran focus groups sessions were held, an additional meeting was conducted in Los Angeles while the project team continued to work with local partners to get representation in NYC.

In total, 22 veterans with self-identified disabilities and one family member participated in the three sessions. The family member came to support her veteran husband but did not take part in the discussions (by choice). All veterans were combat-connected and represented the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. Some participants revealed a connection to a reserve or National Guard unit in addition to one or more terms of service. All participants received a \$25 Amazon Gift Card for participating in the session, and those who helped organize the sessions received a Cornell travel mug as well.

Similar to the employer focus groups, each veteran session began with an introduction to The Bob Woodruff Foundation and an overview of the purpose of the grant, followed by brief individual introductions. In order to ensure a fluid and honest discussion, no taping occurred and a note taker was present at each session. All participants were guaranteed anonymity and that no attribution would be given to particular comments made. All sessions lasted approximately three hours. An organic discussion developed around the following questions which were posed to the group for reflection:

- What have been the major challenges in your transition from the military to civilian life?
- How prepared are you for jobs in the civilian workplace?
- What support and resources do you need to assist you in securing employment?
- How does your disability impact you and your family’s life?
- What type of services have you received and what aspect(s) have you found to be most beneficial?
- What types of service gaps have you encountered?

- What specific goals would you like to achieve in the near term and in the future?

After introductions were completed and discussion began, there was no stall or need to fill time. Each group of veterans spoke passionately and honestly, with many expressing what could only be described as a “paralyzing” fear and extreme uncertainty for their future. Some veterans admitted discussing things with the group that they had never discussed before, admittedly in an effort to help other veterans, and tears were shed in each session. Facilitators ensured that time was afforded to all to share their personal story and offer their opinions, and with the exception of one veteran, all did. At the end of each session many veterans exchanged personal contact information in an effort to stay connected and offer support. All expressed sincere gratitude for the opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, and opinions in an effort to help other veterans.

A summary of the veteran focus group sessions is presented below in the context of continued challenges described by most, as well as the supports and resources they identified as having been most helpful.

#### *Continued Challenges*

Veterans identified a number of shared and unique concerns and challenges related to community reintegration and transition to employment. Challenges tended to be related to system fragmentation and issues associated with identity, both as veterans in a civilian world and a person with a newly acquired disability.

The wait time for services at the VA had a profound impact on veterans accessing and following through with medical and psychological health care. Veterans described ineffective communication from service agencies (both generic community-based and veteran-serving organizations), which tended to lead to a lack of trust and confusion with available services and resources.

Significant complexity and confusion was described around disability. Most veterans admitted to not fully understanding the disability rating system and what a service-connected disability might mean other than compensation. Most veterans indicated that they have neither received any education nor were provided sufficient information to help them understand disability in the context of employment, workplace accommodations, and the rights and responsibilities of employees with a disability in the civilian workforce. The search for meaning/meaningfulness while suffering the loss of military identity was overwhelming and admittedly debilitating for many.

Most veterans in attendance believed that they were ill-equipped to enter the civilian workforce, noting they did not have the updated computer skills necessary for researching and

applying for jobs, and that release points from the military (TAP, GPS) were weak. They expressed disappointment in transition classes taught by military personnel with little or no private sector work experience, and many believed classes should have included strategies and recommendations for adjustment to the civilian workplace culture and guidance on how to thrive in the private sector. Veterans pointed to the fact that a lack of clear expectations in the civilian workforce added to the intense complexity of transition. A number of participants mentioned experiencing credit problems since separating from military service, and most acknowledged limited knowledge of financial literacy and capability. They observed that once credit problems started, it became extraordinarily difficult to move ahead.

Some of the unique concerns described by veterans were associated with housing. Issues of homelessness were discussed, including the problems related to shelter for female veterans with male children over the age of 12. Additionally, the lack of housing support for single veteran fathers has not only contributed to homelessness, but in turn also complicated relationships and contacts with their children.

As a whole, veterans noted that while some had feelings of entitlement, many practiced what was best described as an “avoidance strategy,” i.e. refraining entirely from dealing with the transition process and its realities. Most would have preferred if someone had told them the truth about employment challenges and expectations from service providers.

### *Supports and Resources*

Veterans who participated in the focus group sessions identified several useful resources, including programs they accessed and information they suggested should be shared with others.

Programs identified by name included the following:

- L.A. Collaborative and Veterans’ Economic Community Initiative
- Blue Butterfly Village
- The Mission Continues
- Walking off the War
- Vet Success offices on community colleges and universities
- VR&E

Additional supports that greatly influenced a positive transition outcome for veterans included, but were not limited to:

- Service dogs

- Knowledge of laws (e.g., in California, if a veteran has a service-connected disability, his/her children can attend college for free)
- Connecting with other veterans (e.g., American Legion posts, VFWs, etc.).

### **A Unique Perspective from Veteran/Employers**

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Some of the most relevant perspectives were gained by having the opportunity to learn from employers who could speak from a very personal experience of being a veteran who successfully transitioned from military service to the civilian workforce. Many of these veteran/employers had been medically separated from service, and they were able to discuss the strategies that worked for them in their transition to employment. Their recommendations and suggestions are significant as they were speaking from a lived experience. They were able to convey lessons learned and share this knowledge to support new veterans struggling with the transition process. One of the issues raised was their belief that the service branches (and service members) tended to treat transition as an *event*. Transition is a process that takes time, patience, and (for some) careful monitoring. There was a common belief expressed that each and every transition is unique and regardless of branch of service, experience, injury, or disability, it was important to adopt a “one veteran at a time” focus/mentality. One veteran entrepreneur stated that if “We send them, we must also mend them,” referencing the need to provide sufficient support to aid the military-to-civilian transition process. In that context, many focus group participants shared the fact that in their own experience, it was typically one person who made the difference in helping them get “unstuck,” and helped them to move forward in their transition journey.

One specific example included the assistance provided by one individual who was willing to offer an honest assessment with personalized targeted guidance. The advice included refraining from being too rigid and “buttoned up,” suggestions about participating in informational interviews, making purposeful networking connections, and creating a transition “strategic plan” while holding the veteran accountable for follow-up. All veteran/employers stated that it was one key individual that made all the difference in facilitating their successful transition to civilian life.

Other significant points included the need for more sensitivity and understanding of mission-focused thinking and a veteran’s need to “get the job done.” This is the result of constant and intense training in the military, which might need to be tempered in the civilian work place. Additionally, the group stated on multiple occasions that working in a team environment improved their adjustment to the new organizational culture and subsequent success in the civilian work place: “being a cultural warrior was more important than skill sets.” As to specific attributes of their military background, participants highlighted the following:

Veterans often do more than is expected, they know how to “play” well with others, are problem-solvers, and are able to work independently to get the job done, if needed.

Transition is a slow process for most people. For veterans, however, learning to “de-program” from an environment of strict rules and procedures to a civilian world where expectations are less clearly defined and sometimes inconsistent, adds an additional layer of complexity to the transition experience. It was noted by a number of participants that veterans are not “Plug and Play” workers and therefore may need transition assistance and employment programs that provide longer-term services, including multiple on-the-job and training experiences that are competency-based versus specific degrees. Furthermore, due to the different pace and expectations of civilian employment, it is important to prepare veterans for the cultural differences, including communication styles with managers and co-workers.

### **Family Member Focus Groups**

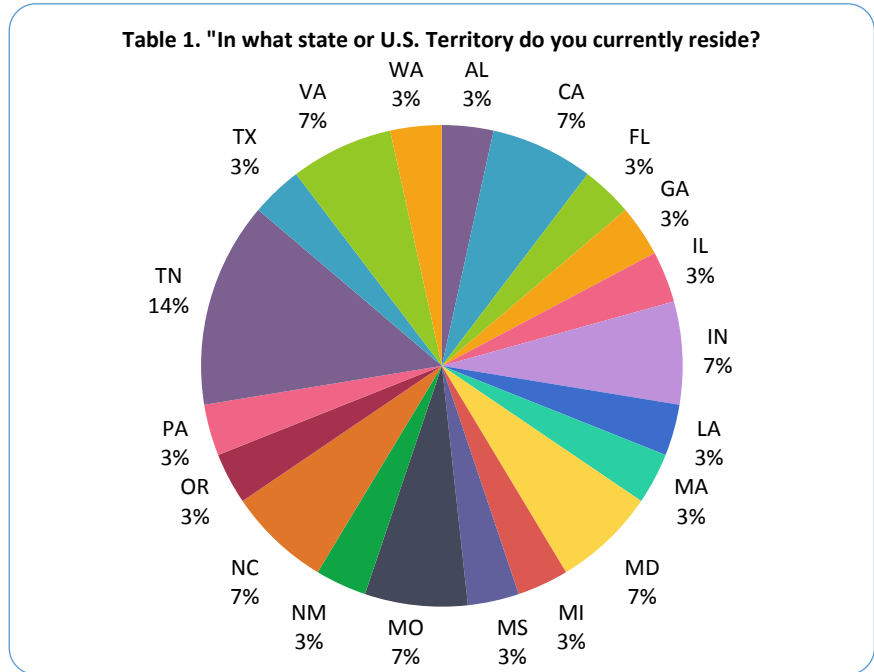
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Despite rigorous recruitment and marketing strategies as well as collaboration with local service organizations and employer focus group participants who identified as a spouse or family member (22.9%), the project team had significant difficulty convening separate focus groups for family members. Due to time and fiscal constraints, and in an effort to meet families where they are, the project team developed a short survey with 10 open-ended questions to gain the critical perspective through the lens of family members. The survey, titled “Family Members of Veterans with Disabilities,” was sent to those who indicated a willingness to use their networks for recruitment. To increase participation, solicitation included a note that the survey was anonymous (unless otherwise noted by the respondent) and participation was completely voluntary. The survey remained open for two weeks to encourage a higher response rate. Once surveys were completed and submitted, respondents were automatically directed to the Bob Woodruff Foundation website.

The survey included two demographic questions, with one required to ensure the responses analyzed were related to family members of post-9/11 veterans with disabilities. All other questions were optional, including location. The complete survey as well as individual survey completion rates can be found in Appendix IV.

Thirty-one (31) completed responses were analyzed, representing participants from 20 different states (see Table 1).

Two respondents chose not to disclose their location. More than two-thirds (68.9%) of respondents identified as a spouse or family member of a post-9/11 veteran living with a service-connected disability; 6.9% as the spouse or family member of a post-9/11 veteran living with a disability not connected to military service; and 24.1% identified as “other.” Criteria provided for “other” included the following: ex-spouse, parent, sister, veteran, healthcare collaborator, and a VA appeals representative. Finally, 74.2% of respondents provided a personal email in order to receive a summary report of all responses.



Family member feedback is provided below. Each question was analyzed independently in order to determine themes or patterns amid each inquiry, and then more broadly across all questions.

*Continued Challenges*

Reintegration challenges from the family member’s perspective covered a wide range of issues, most of which could be bucketed into one or more of BWF’s three impact areas (Education & Employment, Quality of Life, and Rehabilitation and Recovery). Family members continue to struggle with consistent access to care (medical, psychological, respite, home modifications, transportation, etc.), community resources (financial, education, employment services, etc.), and systems (mainly the VA). A large portion of the respondents indicated their veteran was dealing with anger, mood swings, depression, lack of emotion, and social isolation associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a traumatic brain injury (TBI), or other physical injuries. In that vein, there was consensus around the belief that there was a lack of resources at the local (and state) level, and many indicated they did not know where to find information. This seemed especially true for siblings and parents. There was a sense of frustration that family members did not have access to information on “what to expect” with regard to a disabling condition and/or a progressive or degenerative disability.



*“...he applied to probably 500 jobs and got literally no call backs. He removed his army career from his resume and started applying and got multiple phone calls. That really crushed his spirit and made him feel that his successful army career is frowned upon by society...”*

*--Military Spouse*

Family members explained their veteran’s struggle with employment in terms of financial, discriminatory, and cultural barriers. Some described a frustration associated with the ineffectiveness of military job fairs due to lack of employment outcomes, the fact that civilian employers were not willing to offer salaries commensurate with a veteran’s military experience, and most would like to see more awareness training provided. Others described issues associated with their veteran trying to find a challenging and meaningful career while balancing the need for workplace accommodations and flexibility for doctor’s appointments or “bad days.” In addition, they described experiencing discrimination based on “invalid safety concerns” regarding PTSD or due to veteran status in general. More than one respondent indicated their veteran had a VA disability rating of 100% and was therefore “unable to work.” Most expressed dissatisfaction with the wait times associated with access to and receiving medical care and the disability evaluation (and reevaluation) system. Additionally, a lack of appropriate treatment for chronic pain and mental health issues was a common concern. This included medication management, alternative therapeutic intervention, and the knowledge about employment rights and implementation of reasonable accommodations to address functional limitations. It was also evident in the responses that there was a general perception that the VA medical system was understaffed and woefully unprepared to serve the large population of veterans needing critical health-related services.

### *Supports and Resources*

Respondents noted receiving excellent support while still on active duty (before terminal leave was completed, or as a wounded warrior battalion cadre member), but that continued care seemed to be nonexistent once medically retired. There was dissatisfaction expressed with the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) in that the sessions were taught by people who “have no idea what the real world is like, or how to land a job in this day and age.” Not surprisingly, some had wonderful experiences with the VA, while others indicated it was “utterly useless.” Communication groups and individual counseling were noted as helping to bridge communication gaps and coping skills. Oftentimes, resources were discovered through word of mouth and information sharing that occurred organically, as referrals were as inconsistent as the providers of service delivery.

Having additional choices for mental health providers, including private counseling services outside of the VA, was instrumental in locating quality care without the negative consequences associated with the veterans’ prior experiences at the VA. These alternative choices improved

wait times for receiving services and offered closer proximity to their homes. One respondent noted, “Without [counseling], we might not be married.” The VA’s Caregiver Support program was mentioned as a positive, but in one reported incident the spouse was told by the VA that caregiver services were no longer needed, just at the time the veteran began to develop grand mal seizures. A consistent theme in many survey responses was the need to “fight” the system to receive services.

For those respondents who indicated finding helpful information and resources, those sources were wide-ranging and included knowledge gained through employment, community-based organizations, military list serves, conducting online searches, and the VA.

Resources for employment were noted most frequently, particularly associated with job retention and/or identifying positions based on the veteran’s skill set and strengths. Also mentioned was a need to develop grants or programs to help veterans create their own business, based on interest and local need. How and where to apply for financial assistance was a common theme (“we almost lost our house, we’ve struggled to buy groceries, our home is in ill-repair, my student loans defaulted”), as well as the need for financial support during the job search and locating additional housing resources. Finally, an appeal for more education on transitioning back to civilian life (post-deployment) was requested, as well as education about the manifestation and impact of injuries and disabilities for family members.

Some were expecting the VA to do more, “We thought the VA would be more involved in helping with job searches, counseling, etc., but you can’t even get anyone to answer the phone at the VBA.” Respondents desired additional resources for helping veterans and their families to navigate the enormous amount of information available, including websites and individualized services, as well as addressing specific challenges they were facing. Numerous veterans and family members expressed a significant need for access to a guide for navigating the myriad systems.

### *Successful Strategies Found and Used*

A wide range of different strategies were noted as being helpful for family members, including but not limited to: networking (in general), a supportive family and community, and online groups and societies. In addition, social workers and physicians with some level of military cultural competency was listed as being quite valuable. Specific organizations mentioned by name included the following:

- Mentors from Concerned Veterans for America
- Contacts made from Cornell University Roundtable
- Emory Hospital Veteran Program
- Wounded Warrior Family Support Program

- Being active at the local VFW and “spending time with other soldiers”
- Military Warriors Support Foundation (awarded a mortgage-free home)
- Veteran’s Counseling Center
- Fallen and Wounded Soldiers Foundation (Michigan)
- Operation Heal Our Patriots
- Bob Woodruff Foundation
- Internet Society (ISOC) Disabilities Chapter

*“The best piece of advice I can give regarding support is to find others who are like-minded. Find someone who can uplift, encourage, and educate you, but who doesn't add drama into your life. Find someone who can say, "You're not alone," and then help you understand how injury is affecting the situation you are currently facing. The lack of education - specifically on the "invisible" injuries - is insane; when you are educated, you can tackle anything.”*

#### *Advice from Families for Families and Service Organizations*

There was a marked need for families to understand employment laws associated with disability status, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), as well as knowledge of rights and responsibilities under other relevant laws such as the Vietnam Era Veterans Readjustment and Assistance ACT (VEVRA) and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

A number of respondents emphasized the importance of early intervention, ideally starting *before* the veteran leaves service, and a need for more wrap-around services (including counseling) to better ensure collaborative and coordinated service-delivery. A request for a “guided” support group for family members was recommended to share information about resources and coping strategies with others in similar situations. Many family members reported finding resources “by accident,” with some not able to find the appropriate resources until a number of years post injury and/or separation. Others would have liked to see service organizations, dedicated advocates, or social workers be required to make home visits to veterans and involve family members in the deployment and post-deployment process in an effort to help them identify their needs and to navigate appropriate resources earlier.

One of the most often-mentioned recurring challenges was finding a way to eliminate the stigma associated with labels such as “Veteran” and “PTSD.” Additional training for veterans, family members (to include more than the spouse and/or children), and employers was requested by a number of respondents. Finally, consistent with the findings from the employer and veteran groups was the notion that clear messaging and honesty was needed, both for the veteran and family members.

All respondents described a roller-coaster of emotions as they continue to manage the transition process and experience. It was clear that those (few) family members whose veterans found meaningful employment expressed belief that they were the “lucky” ones. The wide range of reactions received can likely be best summed up by the following quote from one survey respondent:

*“My veteran has done everything from pointing a loaded weapon at his head to drinking excessively to trying to kick me out of his life to crying uncontrollably in the transition process. There’s not much “positive” experience in the initial transition out of the military when a veteran finds out he is no longer fit for duty...The positive comes down the road, maybe even a few years later, when you and your veteran start getting on the same page in acceptance of the way injury has changed your lives.”*

### **Recommendations & Next Steps**

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Transition is a process that takes time, patience, and (for some) careful monitoring. There was a commonly-held belief that each and every transition is unique, and that regardless of branch of service, experience, injury, or disability, the primary focus needed to be on a “one veteran at a time” mentality. Veterans described how the lack of clear expectations in the civilian workforce added to the intense complexity of transition. Most simply wanted to have someone tell them the truth about expectations for employment and type of services offered by services providers. There was also a consensus around the belief that there was a lack of resources at a local and state level, and many indicated they did not know where to find information. In this regard, none of the veterans mentioned receiving any education to help them understand disability, workplace accommodations, and the rights and responsibilities of an employee with a disability before and during their transition process. Those who subsequently learned about employment laws and the concept of self-identification of both disability and veteran status noted a fear of disclosure due to stigma and misinformation which continue to impose barriers to employment.

The search for meaning/meaningfulness while suffering the loss of a military identity was overwhelming and observably debilitating for many. Veterans described ineffective communication from service agencies (both generic community-based and veteran-serving organizations) leading to a lack of trust and confusion with available services and resources.

Lastly, a cultural divide between military and civilian life was perceived. This division was seen as contributing to the significant lack of understanding of how military roles and experiences apply to many work environments and was seen as creating a continuing need for help translating and matching skill sets. In addition, there was a call for purposeful mentoring

(both veteran-to-veteran and civilian-to-veteran), career monitoring, and assistance learning how to market (or brand) themselves and their skills to employers.

Recommendations and next steps for tangible improvements for transitioning veterans' reintegration into the workplace included meeting the above concerns and those indicated throughout this report. Overall, all parties identified a need for having a consistent point of contact (a "navigator" of sorts) as early in the transition process as possible. Such a "navigator" could provide assistance to both veterans and family members by identifying and targeting their needs and finding the most appropriate supports and resources.

Another critical and necessary service is that of transition assessment. As the author Lewis Carroll once said, "If you don't know where you are going, how will you know when you get there?" Helping veterans and their families understand where they are in the transition process is a necessary step to success. Identifying interests and a willingness to accept help, addressing disability concerns, and realizing the complexity of brain injuries and post-traumatic stress, as well as the manifestations of depression, are likely to be essential and necessary skills to develop for a successful transition. Most agency and service providers are not providing comprehensive programming or ancillary services necessary for veterans with disabilities to retain successful employment due to system fragmentation. There is also a lack of disability expertise; education and training available for veterans; career development supports; understanding how to leverage community and employer resources; cultural competency of business culture and climate; and follow-along services to assist the veteran throughout his or her progression.

As indicated by a number of focus group participants and veteran family members, "Help the veteran help themselves by teaching them how to survive and thrive in the civilian workforce"

### **In Their Own Words**

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All focus group participants were encouraged to attend sessions because **"YOUR VOICE MATTERS!"** in discussing the challenges and opportunities veterans may face as they transition to the civilian workforce. Messaging was critically important in not only the project team's outreach to focus group participants but also in capturing the authentic perspectives of veterans, family members and employers. Here is what some focus group participants and survey respondents had to say:

- *"Takes a long time to turn a battleship."* - Persist and do not take no for an answer.
- *"Veterans and money is disposable and as a society, we are disposing everyone."*

- *"We are led by the willing – Every day we have an opportunity to make a change and we all need to have the courage to be that change by eliminating the non-value processes."*
- *"Help the veteran help themselves by teaching them how to survive and thrive in the civilian workforce"*
- *Change happens when people become uncomfortable and this is evident in this quote by Anthony Robins: "Change happens when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change."*
- *Helping another veteran: "Help till you can't help anymore."*
- *"Deliver on the promise to vets and make employment a reality."*
- *"Veterans need a new mission and employment is a big part of recovery... It is a management thing."*
- *The military gets us so young. Something much more comprehensive is needed when we leave.*
- *"I may look perfectly fit – but what you can't see is my seizures." How do I explain that to an employer?*
- *"You can get PTS from the VA!"*
- *"I have 20+ years of experience being a service-member, but zero experience being a civilian."*
- *"War fucks people up. Be there when they are ready. You can't help them when they're not ready to be helped."*
- *"We all come from different cultures, yet we all fight side by side somehow...someday."*
- *"What else can I do to make people understand my worth?"*
- *Educate, Empower, and Execute.*
- *"Understand that you will never be as awesome as you were when you went out there with 450 marines..." and that's ok.*
- *"Do not do this by yourself."*
- *"We need to help them identify what they are truly passionate about, and then go from there."*
- *"Community and team is such a big part of the military. They miss it, but they can still get it."*
- *"There are so many challenges but so many solutions. It's just about getting the right people in the room to make things happen."*
- *"One veteran at a time."*

## **APPENDICES**

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- I. Sample Recruitment Materials
- II. Employer Participants
- III. Veteran Participants
- IV. Family Member Survey
- V. Family Member Survey Response Rate

## Appendix I: Sample Recruitment Materials

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### Sample employer marketing flyer

*K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan*  
Institute on Employment and Disability



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## YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

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### **If you are an employer interested in recruiting, hiring and retaining veterans, we want to hear from YOU!**

With support from the *Bob Woodruff Foundation*, the *K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University* is convening a series of focus groups to explore strategies and identify barriers to the successful transition of Post 9/11 Veterans with disabilities from the military to the civilian workforce.

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#### **Date | Time**

Location

*Details to be provided with RSVP*

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**For more information please contact: Judy Young at [jy335@cornell.edu](mailto:jy335@cornell.edu)**

**To register, please contact: Sara Van Looy at [sav22@cornell.edu](mailto:sav22@cornell.edu)**

### 11/6/16: New York City sample letter to organization (Student Veterans of America)

Message  Woodruff flyer.NYC veterans.pdf (316 KB)

MessageHeaderAnalyzer

Greetings,

The K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University recently received a grant from the Bob Woodruff Foundation to convene focus groups for veterans with disabilities, their family members, and employers to solicit information about concerns, challenges, and opportunities for gaining employment in the civilian workforce. Focus groups will be conducted in New York City, NY; San Antonio, TX; and Los Angeles, CA.

The first set of focus groups is scheduled for December 8, 2015 at JP Morgan Chase in New York City. Veterans with disabilities will meet from 9:30 am to 12:00 noon and family members will meet from 1:30 pm to 4:00 pm.

You are receiving this because of your involvement with a Student Veterans of America chapter near our first focus group.


We are asking for your assistance in disseminating the attached flyer to veterans with disabilities and family members residing in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania to allow them the opportunity to share information about their experiences with transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce and community. Our goal is to use this information to affect change in policy and employer practices that would afford veterans with disabilities an easier and more effective transition experience leading to productive lives and meaningful civilian careers.

For more information about the focus groups, please contact Judy Young via email at [jy335@cornell.edu](mailto:jy335@cornell.edu) or phone at 917-597-9124. To register for the December 8<sup>th</sup> event, please contact Sara Van Looy at [sav22@cornell.edu](mailto:sav22@cornell.edu).

We look forward to learning from you.



## 2/22/16: San Antonio sample letter to organization (Student Veterans of America)

Message  San Antonio Veteran and Family Member Flyer.pdf (325 KB)

[MessageHeaderAnalyzer](#) [Bing Maps](#)

Greetings,

The K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University recently received a grant from the Bob Woodruff Foundation to conduct focus groups for disabled Veterans and their family members to solicit information about concerns, challenges, and opportunities for gaining employment in the civilian workforce. Focus groups will be conducted in March in San Antonio and Los Angeles.

Our goal is to use this information to promote changes in policy and employer practices that would improve the transition experience for disabled Veterans and lead to productive and meaningful civilian careers.

You are receiving this because of your attachment to a Student Veterans of America chapter in or near San Antonio.

We are asking for your assistance in recruiting Veterans and their family members by disseminating the attached flyer to Veterans with disabilities and family members.

For more information about the focus groups, please contact Judy Young via email at [jy335@cornell.edu](mailto:jy335@cornell.edu) or phone at 917-597-9124. To register for the event, please contact Sara Van Looy at [sav22@cornell.edu](mailto:sav22@cornell.edu).

We look forward to learning from you.

Thank you.

## Eblast 2/29/16: San Antonio and Los Angeles

**From:** K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability [<mailto:yti-eprrtc@cornell.edu>]

[↑ Next](#) [⚡ Last](#)

**Sent:** Monday, February 29, 2016 12:10 PM

**To:** Katherine K MacDowell <[kkm74@cornell.edu](mailto:kkm74@cornell.edu)>

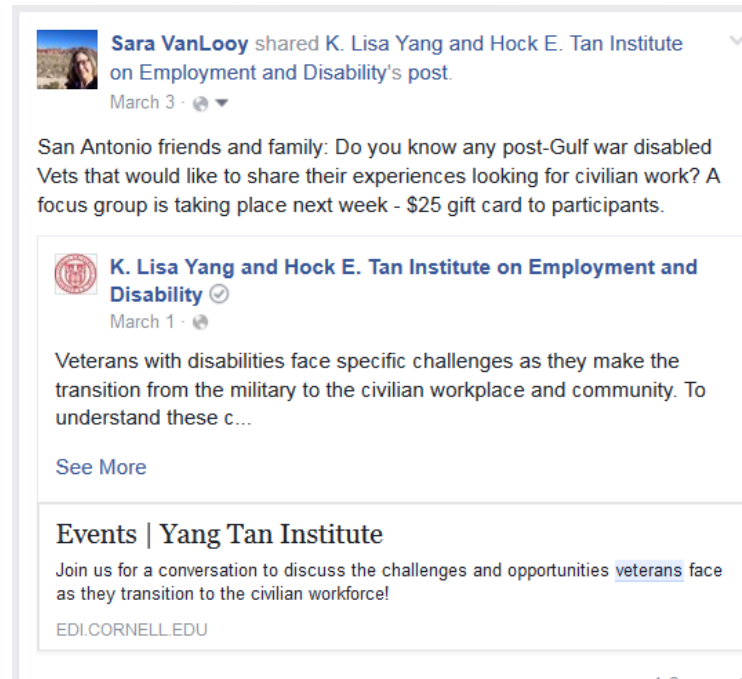
**Subject:** Focus Groups: Veterans with Disabilities in the Workplace

*K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan*  
Institute on Employment and Disability



Veterans with disabilities may face specific challenges as they make the transition from the military to the civilian workplace and community. To understand these challenges and seek solutions, the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability will convene focus groups of veterans with disabilities, family members, and employers with grant support from the Bob Woodruff Foundation. The upcoming focus group meetings for all three groups are scheduled for March 10, 2016 in San Antonio, TX and March 17, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA. For more information, exact location and participation contact Judy Young at [jy335@cornell.edu](mailto:jy335@cornell.edu).

### Facebook 3/3/16: Project staff sharing YTI posting




A screenshot of a Facebook post. At the top, a profile picture of Sara VanLooy is shown next to the text "Sara VanLooy shared K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability's post." Below this, the date "March 3" is visible. The main text of the post reads: "San Antonio friends and family: Do you know any post-Gulf war disabled Vets that would like to share their experiences looking for civilian work? A focus group is taking place next week - \$25 gift card to participants." Below the text is a link to a post from "K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability", dated "March 1". The linked post's text says: "Veterans with disabilities face specific challenges as they make the transition from the military to the civilian workplace and community. To understand these c..." followed by a "See More" link. At the bottom of the linked post is a section titled "Events | Yang Tan Institute" with the text: "Join us for a conversation to discuss the challenges and opportunities veterans face as they transition to the civilian workforce!" and the URL "EDI.CORNELL.EDU".

Sara VanLooy shared K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability's post.

March 3 · 🌐

San Antonio friends and family: Do you know any post-Gulf war disabled Vets that would like to share their experiences looking for civilian work? A focus group is taking place next week - \$25 gift card to participants.

 **K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability** ✓  
March 1 · 🌐

Veterans with disabilities face specific challenges as they make the transition from the military to the civilian workplace and community. To understand these c...

[See More](#)

**Events | Yang Tan Institute**

Join us for a conversation to discuss the challenges and opportunities veterans face as they transition to the civilian workforce!

EDI.CORNELL.EDU

1 Comment

**Facebook 3/1/16: Veterans and family group.**

**K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability**  
 March 1 · 🌐

Veterans with disabilities face specific challenges as they make the transition from the military to the civilian workplace and community. To understand these challenges and seek solutions, the Yang-Tan Institute will be conducting a focus group for disabled Veterans and their family members in San Antonio, TX on March 10, 2016.  
<http://www.edi.cornell.edu/register/index.cfm?event=5772>

**Events | Yang Tan Institute**

Join us for a conversation to discuss the challenges and opportunities veterans face as they transition to the civilian workforce!

EDI.CORNELL.EDU

👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share

2 shares

**3/7/16: Sample Organization Recruiting email (Student Veterans of America)**

Message LA Veteran and Family Member Focus Group.v2.pdf (386 KB)

[MessageHeaderAnalyzer](#)   [Bing Maps](#)   [Suggested Meetings](#)

Greetings,

The K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University recently received a grant from the Bob Woodruff Foundation to conduct focus groups for disabled Veterans and their family members to solicit information about concerns, challenges, and opportunities for gaining employment in the civilian workforce.

Our goal is to use this information to promote changes in policy and employer practices that would improve the transition experience for disabled Veterans and lead to productive and meaningful civilian careers.

We are hosting a focus group for disabled Veterans and their family members next week, on Wednesday, March 15 from 9am to noon in Santa Monica. Each Veteran will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card for participating.

You are receiving this because of your attachment to a Student Veterans of America chapter in the Los Angeles area.

We are asking for your assistance in recruiting Veterans and family members by disseminating the attached flyer to Veterans with disabilities and family members, or forwarding this email to any Veterans you believe may be interested.

For more information about the focus groups, please contact Judy Young via email at [jy335@cornell.edu](mailto:jy335@cornell.edu) or phone at 917-597-9124. To register for the event, please contact Sara Van Looy at [sav22@cornell.edu](mailto:sav22@cornell.edu).

We look forward to learning from you.

Thank you.

## Eblast 3/7/16: Los Angeles

**From:** K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability [<mailto:yti-eprtc@cornell.edu>]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 08, 2016 1:28 PM  
**To:** Katherine K MacDowell <[kkm74@cornell.edu](mailto:kkm74@cornell.edu)>  
**Subject:** Focus Groups: Veterans in the Civilian Workforce

*K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan*  
Institute on Employment and Disability



### YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

**If you are an employer interested in recruiting, hiring and retaining veterans, or a veteran looking to transition from the military to the civilian workforce, we want to hear from YOU!**

With support from the *Bob Woodruff Foundation*, the *K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University* is convening focus groups to explore strategies for the successful transition of Post 9/11 Veterans with disabilities.

The next focus group meetings for employers, veterans, and family members are scheduled for March 16 and 17, 2016 in the Los Angeles, CA area. For more information, exact location and participation contact Judy Young at [jy335@cornell.edu](mailto:jy335@cornell.edu).

## Facebook 3/8/16 for Vets group, LA



The image shows a Facebook post from the "K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability" page. The post is dated March 8 and includes a link to a focus group event in Santa Monica, CA on March 16, 2016. The post also features a link to the institute's website and a hashtag #Stand4Heroes.

 **K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability** ✓  
March 8 · 🌐

Veterans with disabilities face specific challenges as they transition from the military to the civilian workplace and community. To understand these challenges and seek solutions, the Yang-Tan Institute will be conducting a focus group for disabled Veterans and their family members in Santa Monica, CA on March 16, 2016. For more information: <http://goo.gl/MqZRPB> #Stand4Heroes

Events | Yang Tan Institute  
EDI.CORNELL.EDU

👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share

## Facebook 3/10/16 Recruiting employers



The image shows a Facebook post from the K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability. The post is dated March 10 and features the Cornell University logo. The main text of the post reads: "Your Voice Matters! Veterans with disabilities face specific challenges as they transition from the military to the civilian workplace and community. To understand these challenges and seek solutions, the Yang-Tan Institute will be conducting a focus group for interested employers in Redondo Beach, CA on March 17, 2016. Stand4Heroes with the Bob Woodruff Foundation <http://goo.gl/m0YPT1>". Below the main text is a white-bordered box with the heading "Events | Yang Tan Institute" and the text "Join us for a conversation to discuss the challenges and opportunities veterans face as they transition to the civilian workforce!" followed by the URL "EDI.CORNELL.EDU". At the bottom of the post are icons for "Like", "Comment", and "Share", and a notification that says "1 share".

## Eblast 3/11/16: Los Angeles

**From:** K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability [<mailto:yti-eprrtc@cornell.edu>]  
**Sent:** Friday, March 11, 2016 10:38 AM  
**To:** Katherine K MacDowell <[kkm74@cornell.edu](mailto:kkm74@cornell.edu)>  
**Subject:** Focus Group: Los Angeles Veterans in the Civilian Workforce



### Attention Los Angeles Area Employers:

**Unique opportunity to learn, share, and compare your strategies for veteran outreach, inclusion, and retention.** *Cornell University's K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability will conduct an employer focus group meeting on March 17, 2016 from 9:30 - Noon at Northrop Grumman in Redondo Beach, CA.*

For additional information, please contact Judy Young at [jy335@cornell.edu](mailto:jy335@cornell.edu) or register by contacting Sara Van Looy at [sav22@cornell.edu](mailto:sav22@cornell.edu).

## Eblast 5/20/16: Family Survey

From: K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability [<mailto:yti-eprtc@cornell.edu>]  
Sent: Friday, May 20, 2016 1:06 PM  
To: Katherine K MacDowell <[kkm74@cornell.edu](mailto:kkm74@cornell.edu)>  
Subject: Family Members of Veterans with Disabilities Survey

*K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan*  
Institute on Employment and Disability



In an effort to explore the continued challenges faced by post-9/11 veterans with disabilities as they transition from military service back to their home communities and the civilian workforce, Cornell University (in collaboration with the Bob Woodruff Foundation) has conducted a series of focus groups of veterans and the employer community. We have received some great feedback and recommendations from these two groups, but we know the story is not complete without the voices of military spouses and veterans' family members.

Therefore, we have designed a short survey (10 open-ended questions) in order to gain the critical perspective of military family members. If you or someone you know is a spouse or family member of a **service-connected disabled post-9/11 veteran**, we hope you will consider sharing your thoughts with us or encouraging others to do so.

The survey is completely anonymous and participation is voluntary. The survey will remain open until Wednesday, May 25, 2016. You can either click the link above or cut and paste the following url into your web browser: <http://sgiz.mobi/s3/Family-Members-of-Veterans-with-Disabilities>

Questions about the survey and/or the project can be sent to Judy Young: [jy335@cornell.edu](mailto:jy335@cornell.edu).

## Facebook 5/11/16: Family member survey

A screenshot of a Facebook post from the K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability. The post is dated May 11 at 10:20am and is public. The text of the post reads: "Cornell University and the Stand4Heroes with the Bob Woodruff Foundation are seeking input from military spouses and family members about the transition of post-9/11 Veterans with disabilities from the military to civilian life and employment. We hope you will consider sharing your thoughts with us. Our 10-question survey is completely anonymous and participation is voluntary. The link will be active until May 25, 2016: <http://sgiz.mobi/.../Family-Members-of-Veterans-with-Disabili...>". Below the text is a link preview for "Family Members of Veterans with Disabilities" from SGIZ.MOBI. The post has 6 shares and was liked by Camille Lee and 3 others.

**K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability**  
May 11 at 10:20am · Public

Cornell University and the [Stand4Heroes](#) with the [Bob Woodruff Foundation](#) are seeking input from military spouses and family members about the transition of post-9/11 Veterans with disabilities from the military to civilian life and employment. We hope you will consider sharing your thoughts with us. Our 10-question survey is completely anonymous and participation is voluntary. The link will be active until May 25, 2016: <http://sgiz.mobi/.../Family-Members-of-Veterans-with-Disabili...>

**Family Members of Veterans with Disabilities**  
Family Members of Veterans with Disabilities.  
SGIZ.MOBI

Like Comment Share

Camille Lee and 3 others

6 shares

## Twitter 5/16/16

A screenshot of a Twitter tweet from YTI Cornell (@YTI\_Cornell) dated May 16. The tweet text is: "Cornell & @Stand4Heroes seek input from military families on transition of disabled Vets to civilian workforce. [sgiz.mobi/s3/Family-Memb ... ..](http://sgiz.mobi/s3/Family-Memb...)". The tweet has 4 retweets and 4 likes.

**YTI Cornell** @YTI\_Cornell · May 16  
Cornell & @Stand4Heroes seek input from military families on transition of disabled Vets to civilian workforce. [sgiz.mobi/s3/Family-Memb ... ..](http://sgiz.mobi/s3/Family-Memb...)

4 Retweets 4 Likes

## Appendix II – Employer Focus Group Sessions

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### *New York City, NY*

Date: Wednesday, December 9, 2015

Time: 9:30 a.m. to noon

Location: Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 300 Madison Avenue, 23<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Room 23311, New York, NY 10017.

Participants included representatives from:

- CUNY Office of Student Affairs
- SUEZ
- BAE Systems
- Lockheed Martin
- Merck
- The Bob Woodruff Foundation
- Paul Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton, & Garrison
- CITI
- Pricewaterhouse Coopers
- World Wide Technology, Inc
- CUNY Office of Student Affairs
- VerizonWireless

### *San Antonio, TX*

Date: Thursday, March 10, 2016

Time: 9:30 a.m. to noon

Location: San Antonio Area Foundation, 303 Pearl Parkway, San Antonio, TX 78215

Participants included representatives from:

- CPS Energy
- Sirius Computer Solutions
- USAA
- Frost Bank
- Airrosti Rehab Centers
- Wounded Warrior Project
- CPS Energy
- Texas Instruments
- Texas Veterans Commission
- Texas A&M
- Sirius Computer Solutions
- Northrop Grumman/ Operation IMPACT

*Los Angeles, CA*

Date: Thursday, March 17, 2016

Time: 9:30 a.m. to noon

Location: Northrup Grumman Space Technology Center, One Space Park, Redondo Beach, CA 90278

Participants included representatives from:

- Yellow Pages
- Pro Vet Recruiting
- LA Area Manager
- Pride Industries
- The American Legion
- Boeing
- Jacobs
- Boeing
- Qualcomm
- Northrup Grumman/ Operation Impact
- VA Healthcare system
- BAE Systems Inc.

*Albuquerque, NM*

• Date: Wednesday, March 23, 2016

• Time: 9:30 a.m. to noon

• Location: Forest Service conference facilities at the Albuquerque Service Center

Participants included representatives from:

- New Mexico VA Health Care System
- New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Lawyers Helping Warriors
- Concerned Veterans for America
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service
- New Mexico Workforce connection
- Central New Mexico Disability Resource Center
- United States Air Force
- FastPark
- Bureau of Land Management



### **Appendix III – Veteran Focus Group Sessions**

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#### *San Antonio, TX*

Date: Thursday, March 10, 2016

Time: 1:30 – 3:30

Location: San Antonio Area Foundation, 303 Pearl Parkway, San Antonio, TX 78215

#### *Los Angeles, CA*

##### *Activision*

Date: Thursday, March 17, 2016

Time: 9:30-12:30

Location: Activision, 3100 Ocean Park Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90405, from 9:30 – 12:30.

##### *Los Angeles VA*

Date: Thursday, March 17, 2016

Time: 1:30 – 3:30

Location: Los Angeles VA

## Appendix IV – Family Member Survey

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### *Introduction to the Online Survey*

Cornell University received a grant from the Bob Woodruff Foundation (BWF) to conduct a series of focus groups with veterans, family members, and employers in an effort to learn, from their voices, what still needs to be done with regard to helping veterans transition effectively into their home communities and to the civilian workforce.

In an effort to gain the critical perspective from family members, we have identified 10 open ended questions and would welcome your input. This survey is completely anonymous unless you provide us with your contact information at the end (all answers and comments will be compiled without attribution). A summary and recommendations report will be provided to BWF in an effort to support their vision of creating long-lasting positive outcomes for our nation's wounded, ill, and injured service members, veterans, and their families.

Thank you for your time...and for your service.

### *Survey questions*

The following statement best represents me:

- I am the spouse or family member of a Post-9/11 Veteran who is living with a service-connected disability
- I am the spouse or family member of a Post-9/11 Veteran who is living with a disability that is not connected to military service
- Other - Please describe (Required):

In what state or U.S. Territory do you currently reside? (drop-down provided)

1. What challenges have you encountered in assisting your family member during his/her reintegration back into the family, community, and the workplace?
2. What supports and resources have you received to help alleviate the challenges of transition?
3. How/where did you find information about these resources?
4. What support and resources do you and your family member(s) still need to address these challenges?
5. What services have you received to assist your family member with his/her transition? Are there any services you thought you would receive but didn't? What services do you think would be the most useful?

6. Are there any strategies that you have found successful or organizations that were beneficial in supporting the transition and adjustment of your family member to civilian life in general and life with an injury or acquired disability?
7. What is the greatest challenge you have experienced so far in supporting your Veteran?
8. What advice would you give other families who are looking to support the transition of injured Veterans to their communities and about looking for good job opportunities?
9. What advice would you give service organizations about the best way to reach Veterans and family members and about the types, range, and frequency of supports they should provide?
10. Describe some of your most positive and negative experiences in the transition process.

Is there anything else you would like us to know?

If you would like to receive a copy of the survey summary report, please provide us with your name and email address.

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix V – Family Member Survey – individual question response rate**

Question	Response Rate (N = 31)
The following statement best represents me: I am the spouse or family member of a Post-9/11 Veteran who is living with a service-connected disability	68.9%
I am the spouse or family member of a Post-9/11 Veteran who is living with a disability that is not connected to military service	6.9%
Other - Please describe (Required):	24.1%
In what state or U.S. Territory do you currently reside?	93.5%
What challenges have you encountered in assisting your family member during his/her reintegration back into the family, community, and the workplace?	100%
What supports and resources have you received to help alleviate the challenges of transition?	90.3%
How/where did you find information about these resources?	96.8%
What support and resources do you and your family member(s) still need to address these challenges?	96.8%
What services have you received to assist your family member with his/her transition? Are there any services you thought you would receive but didn't? What services do you think would be the most useful?	93.5%
Are there any strategies that you have found successful or organizations that were beneficial in supporting the transition and adjustment of your family member to civilian life in general and life with an injury or acquired disability?	93.5%
What is the greatest challenge you have experienced so far in supporting your Veteran?	96.8%
What advice would you give other families who are looking to support the transition of injured Veterans to their communities and about looking for good job opportunities?	90.3%
What advice would you give service organizations about the best way to reach Veterans and family members and about the types, range, and frequency of supports they should provide?	87.1%
Describe some of your most positive and negative experiences in the transition process.	87.1%
Is there anything else you would like us to know?	64.5%
If you would like to receive a copy of the survey summary report, please provide us with your name and email address.	74.2%

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The Bob Woodruff Foundation works to ensure that injured veterans and their families are thriving long after they return home. The team at BWF navigates the maze of over 46,000 nonprofit organizations to find and fund innovative programs in communities where veterans, their families, and caregivers live and work.

You can learn more about the Bob Woodruff Foundation at [bobwoodrufffoundation.org](http://bobwoodrufffoundation.org).

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