



Hire Minnesota's Veterans

Interagency Employment Working Group and Minnesota National Guard, Jan 1, 2013

Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award Winner — Public Service — Partnerships (Funded jointly by businesses and other organizations including nonprofit and government)

After increasing levels of unemployment among post-9/11 veterans, the Minnesota National Guard organized the Hire Minnesota's Veterans campaign to help today's veterans translate and polish their skills and link them with employers. Through this program the Guard initiated a military-focused Interagency Employment Working Group and created a three-step process for veterans and employers that consolidated existing programs and bridged gaps with new resources. A pilot unit with the 1st Brigade Combat Team dropped from 19 percent to 1.3 percent unemployment as a result of this campaign, while more than 20 million impressions on veteran employment publicized benefits of hiring veterans.

Public service includes programs that advance public understanding of societal issues, problems or concerns. The partnerships subcategory is intended for public service programs that are funded jointly by businesses and other organizations, including nonprofit or government.

Full Text: **BACKGROUND**

The U.S. economy is a challenging place, especially for veterans returning from war. Since 9/11 military veterans have experienced record deployments – and record levels of unemployment. Service members are highly trained and skilled in leadership and vocational trade, yet by 2011 research indicated veteran unemployment was nearly double that of the general population.

In Minnesota the unemployment rate for veterans from post 9/11 was 12.1 percent, significantly higher than the state's overall unemployment rate of 5.7 percent.

In order to reach both veteran employees and potential employers across Minnesota, the Minnesota National Guard (MNNG) launched a pilot program with a 2,700-member unit deployed to Kuwait. The goal: reduce unemployment among this test unit to the state average of 5.7 percent. As part of this initiative the MNNG initiated a military-focused Interagency Employment Working Group (IEWG) to lead this integrated campaign. Made up of more than 20 federal, state and local organizations, the National Guard worked with this group to create and implement a comprehensive strategic communication plan to identify specific needs, bring together existing resources, develop methods needed to bridge gaps, promote the initiative to both veterans and employers, and highlight how and why hiring veterans is good for business. The IEWG created a three-step process to revolutionize Minnesota's response to veteran employment, while empowering veterans and creating a model program for the nation. Throughout the planning process the need to bring resources to the desert evolved, and in spring of 2012 the MNNG assembled an 11-member Employment Resource Team to visit Kuwait and pilot the process.

As a result of this campaign, a final measurement in December 2012 demonstrated astounding results; unit unemployment rates dropped from 19 percent to 1.7 percent, while more than 20

million impressions on veteran employment publicized benefits of hiring veterans.

RESEARCH

The MNNG partnered with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) to conduct and evaluate a survey of the employment situation and employment concerns among the MNNG's 1st Brigade Combat Team while deployed. This survey, which received an award from the Community & Economic Research Award, demonstrated more than 19 percent of the 2,700 soldiers had employment concerns upon return and that veterans are overwhelmed by the number of options and programs available to assist with unemployment. This research also provided details on geographical data, which indicated that the problem was statewide.

The MNNG and IEGW also evaluated secondary research, including Bureau of Labor and Statistics report, reports from the State of Minnesota and federal VA on Veterans and employment.

The research identified:

- Unemployment is a growing issue for post 9/11 veterans ("today's" veterans).
- Minnesota already has a high number of state and federal programs designed to provide employment assistance to veterans.

PLANNING

Based on the research, the MNNG knew that although Minnesota boasted a number of programs designed to assist veterans, without a centralized initiative coordinating and promoting these resources veterans were still not receiving the assistance they needed.

These findings helped shape a strategic approach, including the following **objectives**:

1. **Reduce unemployment** of Minnesota veterans in the 1st Brigade Combat Team from 19 percent to the state unemployment rate of 5.7 percent by October, 2012.
2. **Increase veteran and employer usage of employment resources** by 10 percent between January, 2012 and December, 2012.
3. **Create awareness and preference for hiring veterans** by generating 5 million gross impressions through December, 2012.

Target Audiences:

A seven page in-depth communications matrix identified target audiences and coordinated activities and initiatives with specific groups. These key audiences included veterans and their families, business leaders, state legislators, veteran business owners, aspiring veteran business owners, employers, state agencies and dislocated workers.

Target Media:

Local print and broadcast media, editorial writers, business publications and public television

Strategies:

1. Unify, consolidate and create resources dedicated to veteran employment.
 - Hire Minnesota's Veterans.
 - Minnesota National Guard and the Interagency Employment Working Group.
2. Link employment resources with veterans statewide.
3. Connect highly skilled veterans with Minnesota employers.
4. Establish and promote benefits of hiring Minnesota veterans.

The **budget** of \$45,000 was provided jointly through members of the IEGW and covered limited advertising (buses and billboards) and print marketing materials.

EXECUTION

Strategy 1: Unify, consolidate and create resources dedicated to veteran employment.

- Established a veteran-focused Interagency Employment Working Group comprised of more than 20 federal, state and local organizations.
- Re-focused and launched a webpage dedicated to veterans and employers: www.PositivelyMinnesota.com/veteran
- Created a simple three-step process for veterans to translate their military skills into civilian careers.
- Worked with Governor Mark Dayton to proclaim July "Hire a Veteran Month" in Minnesota.

Strategy 2: Link employment resources with Minnesota veterans statewide.

- Hosted Employment Resource Team made up of public and private employment and HR professionals to assist deployed soldiers in Kuwait.
- Engaged and trained 68 Veteran Employment Officers located at statewide workforce centers.
- Synchronized and promoted veteran job fairs.
- Incorporated three-step employment training at 30-Day and 60-Day reintegration events for returning Minnesota veterans and their spouses.

Strategy 3: Connect highly skilled veterans with Minnesota employers.

- Launched a veteran-friendly employer website.
- Met with 75 employers to present available resources to connect them with veterans.
- Targeted Minnesota employers at Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve breakfast.
- Created print collateral and online products.
- Synchronized more than 50 veteran job fairs.

Strategy 4: Establish and promote benefits of hiring Minnesota veterans

- Facilitated celebrity endorsement and PSAs in partnership with country music artist Rockie Lynne.
- Supported and passed legislation for Veterans Preference hiring.
- Promoted across multiple social media platforms.
- Partnered with Minnesota Twins to recognize veteran employers at selected home games.
- Created print and online promotional material.
- Pitched veteran employment and veteran success stories to statewide media.

EVALUATION

All objectives were exceeded.

Objective 1: Reduce unemployment of Minnesota veterans in the 1st Brigade Combat Team from 19 percent to the state unemployment rate of 5.7 percent by Oct., 2012.

- Follow-up surveys demonstrate unemployment concerns exceeded goals and dropped below an astonishing 1.3 percent.
- Testimonials from members of the BCT linked success directly to campaign efforts.
- Within three weeks of the Employment Resource Team visit soldiers began to get hired.
- Minnesota employers such as Thompson Reuters, US Bank and Target are aggressively recruiting veterans.
- United Health Group and 3M are engaging in the President's veteran hiring initiative and cite this program as motivation to launch from Minnesota.
- Program will be implemented for all returning units.

Objective 2: Increase veteran and employer usage of employment resources by 10 percent between Jan., 2012 and Dec., 2012

- Collaborated with Governor Mark Dayton on a \$3,000 tax credit for businesses to hire veterans.
- Veteran preference legislation passed allowing employers to specifically recruit veterans.
- Visits and page views increased by 42 percent to PositivelyMinnesota.com/Veteran.
- There are currently 6,639 veteran resumes posted.
- Minnesota employers can now identify as veteran-friendly and have posted more than 7,900 jobs at www.PositivelyMinnesota.com/veteran.
- Veteran customers at WorkForce Centers reached 37,415 by November, 2012, up from 25,460 in 2011.
- The 2012 Veterans Career Fair drew 33 percent more employers and 62 percent more veterans than 2011.
- The campaign inspired and promoted more than 50 career fairs around the state, up from five in 2011.

Objective 3: Create awareness and preference for hiring veterans by generating 5 million gross impressions through December, 2012

- Garnered more than 10 million media impressions.
- The campaign's specific targeted key messages were included in the media.
- Generated online engagement through social media.
- Advertising created 9.7 million impressions.
- PSAs ran more than 1000 times on various stations throughout the upper Midwest.

Public Relations Society of America © 2013

Product #: 6BW-1305E02