

# Closing the Loop

## An Eight-Step Guide to Building a Holistic Military Spouse Employment Program

 BLUE STAR FAMILIES

In collaboration with

 Syracuse University  
D'Aniello Institute for  
Veterans & Military Families   
JPMorgan Chase & Co., Founding Partner



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Blue Star Families was founded with the mission to strengthen military families by building robust communities of support. Through our research and data, we identify the greatest needs within the military family community and create programs and solutions that will empower military families to thrive, such as career development tools, local community events, and caregiver support. Since its inception in 2009, Blue Star Families has engaged tens of thousands of volunteers and served more than 1.5 million military family members. With Blue Star Families, military families can find answers to their challenges anywhere they are.

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## Introduction

Military spouse employment has been a top issue for military families for more than a decade. Despite the concerted efforts of government leaders, philanthropic supporters, corporate collaboratives, and military- and Veteran-supporting organizations targeting this issue, the military spouse unemployment rate has stubbornly remained at more than 20% for over a decade, several times more than the comparable civilian rate.

USAA, Navy Federal Credit Union, and PenFed Credit Union partnered to address this intransigent issue, and invested in this research to determine what works to help military spouses obtain meaningful, long-term employment.

This focus group report is the first report in the Military Spouse Employment Study Research Series, a three-year effort to identify the policies, programs, practices, and characteristics that are associated with positive spouse employment outcomes. The study includes three arms of research:

- a series of cross-sectional surveys, including a longitudinal effort following a panel of active-duty military spouses for three years,
- interviews with military spouses, exploring the inflection points of their employment journeys and what influenced their employment choices, and
- a series of focus groups with employers to identify the challenges and solutions to recruiting and retaining military spouse talent.

This report is focused on the insights and results from the employer focus groups.

## Executive Summary

### **Employers need to identify military spouse employees and job candidates in order to provide effective support.**

Military spouses are hesitant to disclose their military affiliations to current or potential employers due to the perception that it will impact them negatively.<sup>1</sup> However, this reticence makes it challenging for employers to identify and support military spouse employees and applicants. In addition to identifying military spouse applicants, identifying current military spouse employees was the most commonly reported challenge among employer focus group participants. Recognizing and proactively addressing spouses' concerns about discrimination can help to demonstrate broad organizational support for military spouse employment and encourage spouses to self-identify.

### **Directly engage military spouses using available networks, highlight job portability, differentiate between Veteran and military spouse hiring strategies, and assess skills rather than resumes when recruiting for open positions.**

Military spouses are a tight-knit community, which can be a challenge to navigate for those looking to support spouse employment. Engaging with broader community initiatives like the Military Spouse Employment Partnership, Blue Star Families' Spouseforce, and attending military spouse-specific hiring events are suggested tools for tapping into the military spouse talent pool. Evaluating current and potential employees based on their skill sets instead of their employment history can help level the playing field for military spouses with nonlinear career paths. and their families.

### **Cross-organizational collaboration is a win for everyone involved.**

The willingness to support military spouses does not make every employer the right fit for every military spouse job seeker. Employer focus group participants stressed the importance of sharing identified military spouse talent with other organizations who may be a better fit for that individual. Demonstrating that your organization is a community that military spouses can rely on will have cascading effects that could increase military spouse willingness to self-identify and expand the organization's talent sourcing pool.

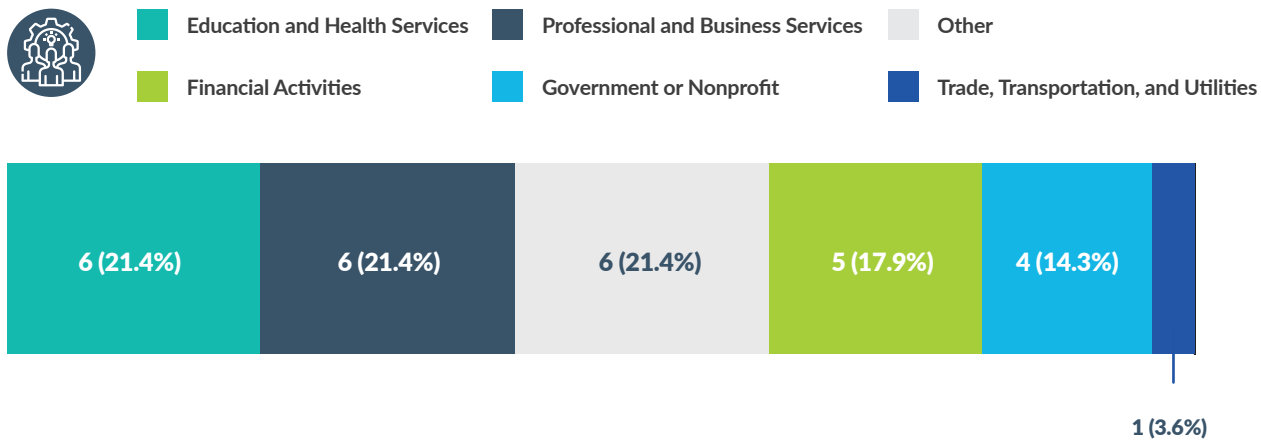
### **Initiatives need cross organizational support, advocacy, and resources for long-term sustainability.**

A sustainable employment initiative requires continued support from leaders and advocates across the organization, addressing any internal misconceptions about military spouse employees' reliability, and building the case for military spouse talent. Organizational differences will inherently require individualized military spouse initiatives, but formalizing processes internally will help demonstrate broad support and buy-in from others within the organization. However, support alone is not enough; organizations must also allocate appropriate resources to their individual efforts to ensure initiative sustainability.

## Profile of Participants

A total of 28 human resource (HR) professionals who already employ military spouses at 25 organizations participated in the study. While both small businesses and large multinational corporations across industries were represented, the greatest proportion (n=10) of participants were employed by organizations with between 100-9,999 employees. All participants' employers were based in the United States, but nearly two-thirds also hired for positions overseas. Within these organizations military spouses typically held a variety of administrative to mid-level management positions, such as marketing coordinator, customer service professional, and nurse.

**Figure 1:** Participant employers by industry<sup>a</sup>



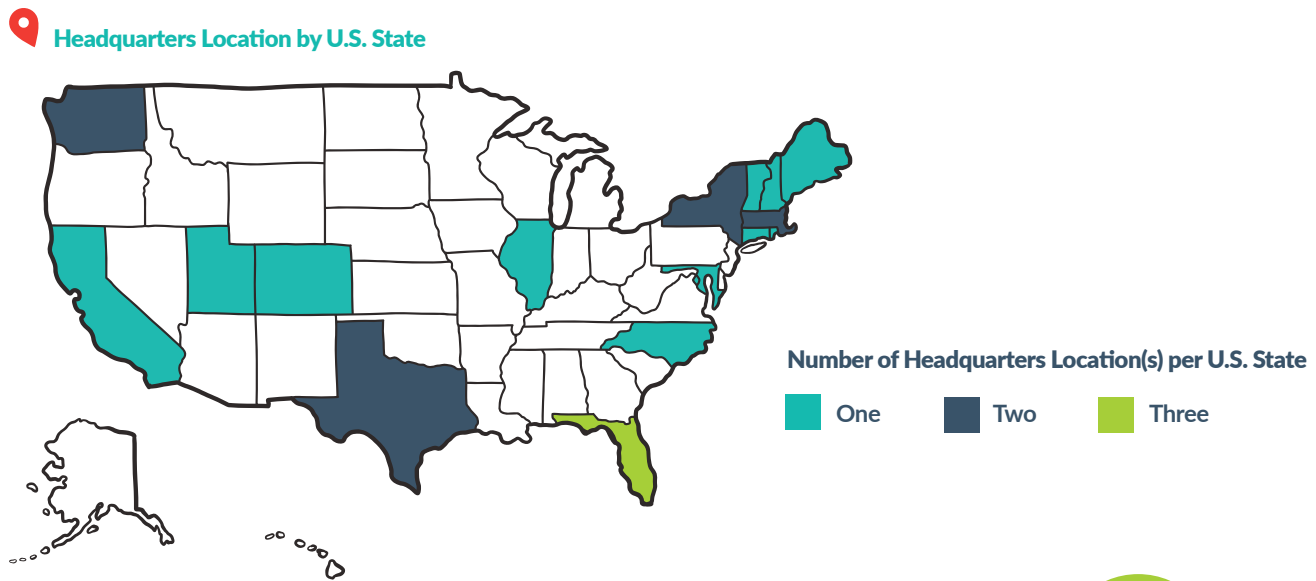
**Figure 2:** Participant employers by size<sup>b</sup>




<sup>a</sup> Among those who reported

<sup>b</sup> Among those who reported

**Figure 3: Employer Characteristics<sup>c</sup>**



**90%**   
of participants were military-connected

**63%** of participants' employers offer employment **outside** the continental United States (**OCONUS**) 

- Examples of positions often filled by military spouses:**
- Marketing Coordinator
  - Financial Services Representative
  - Customer Service Professional
  - Manager
  - Accountant
  - Adjunct Professor
  - Nurse
  - Recruiter



<sup>c</sup> Among those who reported

## Methodology

Focus group participants were recruited from Blue Star Families' membership pool via social media, email invitations, and outreach to a professional association for military spouse employers. Interested participants were asked to fill out an online form with demographic and contextual information. Blue Star Families employees were not eligible to participate. Blue Star Families researchers conducted seven focus groups, with groups ranging from 1 to 10 participants from March-April 2023. Focus group facilitators used a semi-structured focus group guide focused on understanding participants' experiences with military spouse hiring, retention, and employment solutions. There was no incentive provided for participation. Each focus group was recorded and transcribed via Zoom, then cleaned and coded by Blue Star Families researchers. Each focus group lasted approximately one hour.

## Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when reviewing this study's findings. First, given that qualitative case studies do not draw from a representative or random sample, it is not possible to make broad assessments about the entire population of military spouse-hiring employers. Rather, emergent themes should be taken as a signal of innovative military spouse recruitment and retention initiatives implemented by a sizable and diverse sample of employers in the U.S. Second, because participants were recruited through organizations that support military spouses and the overwhelming majority are personally military-affiliated, it is likely that findings reflect the experiences of human resource professionals who are already well-informed about military spouse employment challenges, which will not reflect all U.S. employers. These participants may have greater awareness about military life than other employers who hire military spouses. There are also limitations to the survey questions that establish participants' characteristics. For example, when participants were asked about the size of their employer, some responded "hundreds" and others provided a more specific number. These answers were recoded and collapsed into several categories, which limits analysis but provides important context to interpret participants' responses during the focus groups. Lastly, demographic information about participants, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and professional seniority, were not collected. Therefore, further research is needed to characterize these themes by participant positionality, particularly among employers who are not familiar with the military.



**Step 1.**

# Assemble a dream team.

All participants reported growing interest among organizational leaders and hiring managers in increasing their number of military spouse hires. **However, participants explained that meeting these organizational goals required more Human Resources (HR) support.** As recruiters, HR managers, and program directors, many had other responsibilities beyond leading their organization's military spouse employment program. Only about half of participants were tasked with military employment exclusively. Among them, the majority reported splitting their time between Veteran and military spouse initiatives.

**Engage a variety of organizational leaders in military spouse employment initiatives to increase capacity for retention and marketing efforts.**



Even those focused exclusively on military spouse talent were often the sole employee responsible for meeting military spouse employment goals. These jacks-of-all-trades, often recruiters or diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) specialists, explained that the majority of their effort was focused on hiring military spouses given their specialty. **Additional HR expertise was needed to ensure organizations are also retaining military spouses.**

**“For talent acquisition we’re just looking to hire. We don’t do any of the transferring. That’s the reason why it is hard for me to explain to my manager what will be the best way to create this transfer of team members in order for us to retain or have that retention. We just hire. That’s not our part of the job.”**

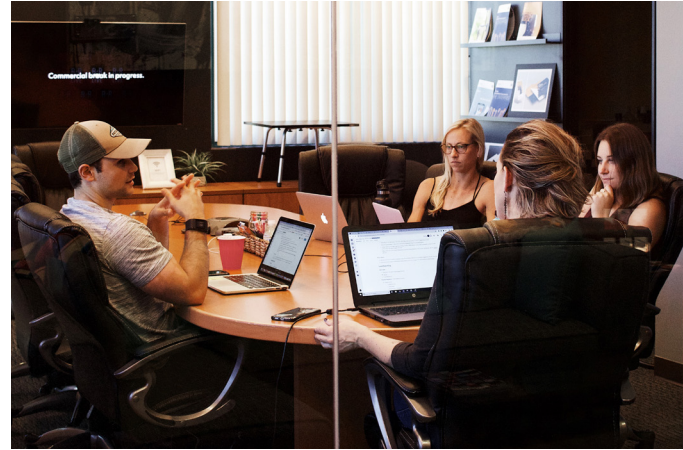
Talent Acquisition Specialist<sup>d</sup>

<sup>d</sup> Positions titles are pseudonyms to protect participants' anonymity.

## Closing the Loop: Step 1

Participants on teams of military-focused HR professionals reported greater bandwidth for resolving retention roadblocks once military spouses were hired. With more hands, participants could serve informally as “points-of-contact” for military spouse employees, helping them advocate to department leaders for support during periods of frequent relocation<sup>2</sup> and family separation. These relationships were reportedly key to keeping military spouses employed once hired.

Larger military HR teams also reported segmenting HR recruitment functions between “military talent liaisons” who focused on strategic sourcing via LinkedIn, Indeed, and career fairs and “military marketing and events staff” who manage employer relationships with installations and local Veteran/ military service organizations. Although participants agreed that a robust team wasn’t necessary to start a military spouse employment program, gaining buy-in from key stakeholders was a consistently reported necessity throughout focus groups.



**“You have to have an advocate within the organization that pushes the conversation. You just have to have somebody that has a commitment to succeed. And, secondly, you have to have a leader that buys into what you’re trying to achieve.”**

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Talent Specialist



**“Military talent liaisons”** to focus on strategic sourcing via LinkedIn, Indeed and career fairs.



**“Military marketing and events staff”** to manage employer relationships with installations and local veteran/ military service organizations.

## Key Takeaways

**More HR support needed**

**Identify points-of-contact**

**Consider recruitment and retention**

Step 2.



# Identify military spouse talent.

Establish a protocol for tracking current military-connected employees.



Finding current military spouse employees was participants' first and **most commonly reported challenge**. Although 78% said their employer had a formal military spouse human resources program, **fewer than half** knew how many military spouses their organization had employed to date, making it nearly impossible to track their program's success.

**78%**

of participants said their employer had a formal military spouse human resources program

**fewer than half** knew how many military spouses their organization had employed

Participants described creative tactics for inviting current employees to self-identify, such highlighting military liaison positions in internal newsletters, planning diversity awareness months to encourage self-disclosure, and building internal employee directories with the ability for employees to mark their military spouse status. For a more visually striking approach, participants recalled some employers distributing hats, T-shirts, or lapel pins for military-connected employees to wear on military holidays.



### **Offer several ways for future military spouse employees to self-identify in applications and onboarding.**

While the simplest way to identify military spouse candidates in the recruitment process might be to ask them about their status, participants explained that employers are often hesitant to do so due to the protected nature of marital status information. **Instead, participants encouraged applicants to answer standard questions with military-related answers to help identify them.** One participant suggested applicants list military spouse hiring fairs when answering the question “how did you hear about us?” Another employer directed military spouses to provide a copy of military orders if applying outside of a job opening’s location.

However, these forms of identification require a time-consuming manual documentation process, and may miss military spouse applicants who did not apply through a military spouse hiring fair or outside of the area. As a result, a few participants indicated their employers ask directly if applicants are military spouses, but do not make the question mandatory. Several participants bypassed applications for identification altogether and instead discussed military spouse employment initiatives during interviews and employee orientation hoping to invite new hires to disclose.



### **Be transparent about why military spouses should self-identify to combat concerns about discrimination.**

Regardless of the number of options offered for military spouse self-identification, participants still faced **hesitation due to fear about employer bias.**<sup>3</sup> To encourage disclosure, participants offered clear explanations of what is done with their information and who will have access to it.

**“We integrated military spouse self ID into [the employee directory] so that it was a safer designation area. I think that goes with the inclusion efforts, because that’s a place where you can designate “yes, I would love my manager to know this,” or “I would like to remain anonymous to my manager,” but maybe to be counted for the company, so you can designate a couple of different ways.”**

Military Programs Manager

“We need them to very boldly, proudly identify themselves on that application or their resumes. We don’t ask for this to exclude them. We’re asking for this [applicants to self-identify as a military spouse] because we know that this is the only way that we can see that they are a military spouse without asking if they were [a] military spouse, as we all know, that is a no-no.”

Military Programs Manager

Ultimately, participants stressed the need for military spouses to come forward voluntarily so they can advocate for them.



Find creative ways for military connected employees to self-identify.



Encourage applicants to answer **standard questions** with military-related answers to help identify them.

## Key Takeaways

Find military-connected employees

Explain why it matters

Encourage self-identification

**Step 3.**

# Make the pitch to managers and applicants.

Resistance to hiring military spouses was a common challenge for participants charged with championing them through the selection process. Substantiating military spouses' fears about discrimination, participants explained that misguided beliefs about military spouses' reliability during deployments and frequent relocation often counted against military spouse candidates. Participants vehemently opposed these characterizations, echoing previous research about **military spouses' adaptability and commitment.**<sup>4</sup>

**Promote military spouse talent internally by addressing misconceptions.**



**“The irony is that military spouses are incredibly resilient. We get things done. We will make it happen, no matter where our spouse is, what’s going on, through a move. We could be in a hotel room with our laptop on a box. We will get it done.”**

Talent Acquisition Manager

**“Military spouses can make lemonade out of potatoes. It benefits the company and the employees to have military spouses within their workforce.”**

Military Programs Director



<sup>3</sup> Bradbard, Maury & Armstrong (2016)

## Closing the Loop: Step 3

Participants showcased military spouse successes through testimonials in company newsletters and lunch-and-learn panels for managers to counter misconceptions. Organizations like Deloitte also share these stories and educational materials on their [Military Spouse Initiative](#) websites.

**“Once you have that person, you put them in that position, and they succeed. We use that success to launch other people. Hey? Look how well that worked. Let’s try someone else.”**

HR Generalist

**Demonstrating that military spouses were a part of both their organizational and local communities was a top goal in internal messaging.** Participants explained that framing military spouse employment as a national security issue often resonated with decision makers. The PsychArmor course, [“15 Reasons to Hire a Military Spouse”](#) and applied research reports such as the Institute for Veterans and Military Families’ [“A Business Case for Hiring Military Spouses”](#) were valuable educational resources.

**“We are in training mode continually, making sure not only that the military spouses are prepared, but that the hiring managers understand the talent that they are receiving. We actually go back in time, we talk about the education levels of the military spouses. We talk about what they can bring to the organization, especially with the DEI that we’re looking at. It really is a snapshot of society and what they’re going to be able to add to their team.”**

Military Programs Manager

### **Advertise job transferability to attract military spouse applicants.**

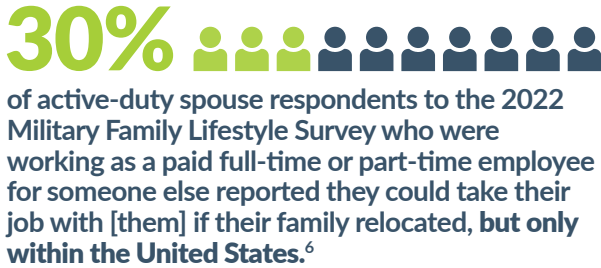
Given the transient nature of military life, several participants highlighted opportunities for job transfer to garner interest in their employment opportunities from military spouses. **Offering a transfer guarantee or the ability to submit a waiver to work remotely were mentioned as major selling points**, particularly for participants employed by less well known organizations. These indirect incentives were reflected on social media and careers websites.



**“Any role that you have within the company, if you are moving to an area that’s outside of 50 miles from a headquarters or store location, we will work to transfer your job to remote. That’s a huge win for us.”**

HR Specialist

Not all participants were able to offer military spouse employees the ability to keep their job through relocation. In some cases, participants were unable to retain customer-facing military spouse employees because there were no physical locations near military spouses' new duty stations. In other cases, employers could not legally employ military spouses in their new duty states or countries due to tax law or SOFA agreements.<sup>5</sup> Still, participants who consistently advocated for relocating military spouses noted that some leaders were beginning to reframe this perspective.



**“What supports or policies helped you/your employer maintain your employment through a PCS/ETS move?”**

Active-duty Spouse Respondents to the 2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey (n=249)<sup>e</sup>

**Supportive leadership/HR**



**“[In the past] it was like, ‘Oh, if they’re living in one of the states that we already serve, then that makes it easier for taxes,’ but within the last year our CFO has said, ‘We’ve got to get rid of that mindset. We CAN handle it. We CAN deal with it. Our payroll, our staff, our teams can work with that,’ so we’ve had a lot of folks in positions that weren’t initially remote be able to adjust and change for them to now be remote, so that’s really exciting.”**

Recruiter

### **Differentiate between Veteran and military spouse hiring strategies and programs.**

Participants caution against advertising military Veteran and spouse employment initiatives interchangeably given differences in their employment needs and wants. Military spouse candidates are often more transient and may have access to fewer federally-designated financial resources, such as education benefits and fellowship programs, to support their professional development. Further, participants suggested that military spouses may not understand from military- or Veteran-targeted marketing that employers seek military spouses candidates too. The free one-hour PsychArmor course, [Creating a Military Spouse Hiring Program](#), is a useful resource for building a military-spouse specific initiative.

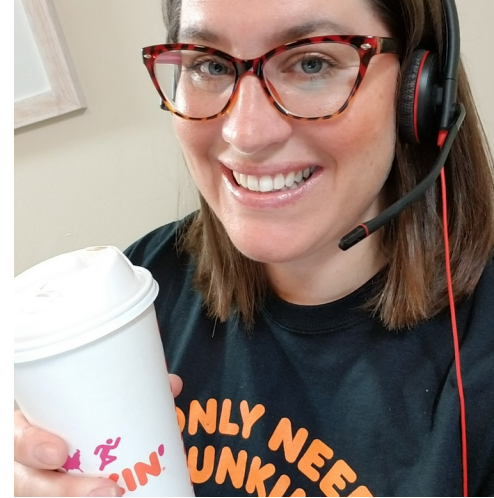
**“We create a distinct line between our military Veteran program and military spouse program to make sure that they are not lumped in with the Veterans [...] We want them to feel special in a sense not to, you know, be completely separate, but we want them to at least have that distinguished separation of they’re not a Veteran, but they are [a] military spouse, and we do appreciate that aspect.”**

Manager of Military Programs

<sup>e</sup> Question was asked of active-duty spouse respondents who reported they were able to retain their civilian employment through a PCS/ETC move. Most common response was “remote/telework” followed by “supportive leadership/HR”. Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey (2020). [Unpublished finding].

### **Allow military spouses to be ambassadors to your organization.**

Participants frequently noted the success of outreach for military spouses by military spouses. Although almost all participants (90%) were military-connected, those who could not speak to military spouse experiences personally found **partnering with a military spouse at hiring events valuable**. Placing military spouses at the recruitment table demonstrated to job seekers that they **belonged within participants' organizations**.



**“I’ve had [military spouses and Veterans] join me at job fairs, and I almost don’t like to do them without, because I don’t speak the language. I try my best, but you know I’m just not it, so to have someone that they can connect with, and also realize that there’s that connection, that embrace, that brotherhood/sisterhood that I just can’t sell. You can’t sell it. It’s a natural thing that has to come from a personal connection from someone, and I watch it happen right next to me, and there’s no there’s no faking that.”**

Recruiter

## **Key Takeaways**

**Show military spouses at work**

**Job transfer/remote work options are top selling points**

**Bring military spouses to hiring fairs**

**Step 4.**

# Connect with military spouse networks.

**Participate in military spouse partnership programs and hiring events to meet job seekers where they're at.**



Participants suggested that the tight-knit community of military spouses is both a great recruitment opportunity and a challenge for those getting started. To tap into military networks, **participants highly recommended offering a referral bonus and promoting it among military-connected employees.** Participants also found success engaging with community initiatives like the [Military Spouse Employment Partnership](#), [Blue Star Families' Spouseforce](#), and [Twelve Million Plus](#) to advertise employment opportunities directly to military spouses.<sup>7</sup>

Volunteering in-person and online with local programs such as military installation employment readiness offices, community development organizations and military/Veteran service organizations was another way participants built brand awareness among military spouse job seekers. **Participants recommended attending community events, resume reviews, and virtual job fairs on a continual basis.**



**“We try to connect with the family support program, and then also to Facebook. We also got connected with Veterans, representatives, different districts, letting them know that we want to be a part of the military community.”**

HR Generalist

## Outreach to employed military spouses seeking professional growth, too.

Echoing a myriad of previous research studies,<sup>8,9,10</sup> participants frequently acknowledged that **underemployment of military spouses is also a problem in need of employer attention.** Participants emphasized the importance of advertising both entry-level jobs and mid- to senior-level career opportunities to military spouse networks.<sup>11</sup> For example, T-Mobile partnered with Blue Star Families to highlight the diversity of positions available for military spouses in Spouseforce, an online group for military spouse jobseekers.



**“Military spouses often get tagged for those low paying admin jobs, you know, making the phone calls, doing that face-to-face stuff, when so many are capable of higher level positions. Companies just automatically go straight to the customer service roles instead of those VP roles that we have.”**

Director of Operations

Offering current military spouse employees the resources to advance to more senior positions was another recommendation for building a holistic employment program.

**“We want to see not only are we retaining the talent, but are they developing? Because every time a military spouse gets ready to get to that next level, they PCS. I did when [our family] was actively serving. I was always just this close to promotion, and I had to find another job as everybody else did.”**

Military Programs Manager

## Key Takeaways

**Tap into military spouse networks**

**Community events build brand awareness**

**Advertise jobs at all levels**

**Consider career development**

**Step 5.**

# Select for potential.

Participants frequently identified employment gaps on resumes as a primary barrier to getting military spouses hired, explaining that managers are trained to weed out atypical candidates.

Two strategies helped participants demonstrate their candidates' potential to interviewers. Participants hosted **resume review workshops with hiring managers** to educate them about why military spouses may change jobs often, work part time, and have less seniority than other candidates. **Resume review "cheat sheets"** also helped translate how common volunteer skills and experiences might be relevant for positions within their organizations.

**Worry less about resumes and more about skills.**



**"We created a quick one-pager for just translation. If you see this skill set on a military spouse resume, this is what it means to us. It's literally a one-for-one one page and it made a huge difference in actually getting these spouses past the first screen."**

HR Manager



When possible, **participants advocated for completely ditching resumes**, citing the redundancy of information already supplied in job applications and the undue stress that resume writing and review places on interviewers and job seekers. Participants suggested that pre-employment assessments offer a better picture of candidate aptitude than resume formatting.

**"We do not look at the resume. We go right to a conversation. I'll tell you I've seen some of the world's worst resumes on people that we have hired and every time I see that I'm just thrilled because the message is getting through. Look for reasons to say yes, not reasons to say no."**

Director of Military Programs

### Create a military spouse advisory committee to support candidate review.

Participants discussed **forming groups of current military-connected employees to advise leaders about military spouse candidate potential**. These group members were tapped to formally weigh in on training, policy revisions, and application reviews, empowering current military spouses to shape the future of their organization's employment initiative. Although military spouses may be willing to volunteer, **employers should formalize their contributions on job descriptions and evaluations and compensate them for additional responsibilities**.

**“We’re going to be pulling in the military spouses and Veterans within the company to help review these resumes so that they can help connect the dots there, because sometimes it’s not quite clear how well this relates to [organization name] and the positions we’re looking to fill. But the experience is so tremendous that we’re gonna have an internal group to help with resume review.”**

HR Specialist

### Develop training programs with aptitude in mind.

Participants leveraged **employer-sponsored training programs** to increase opportunity for military spouse job seekers without directly applicable skills. Fellowship and trainee programs give participants the ability to hire for potential and military spouses a certification they can take with them when they relocate.

**“If they are interested in the pharmacy career, we offer that training at no cost and sponsor for their tests. We sponsor for the renewal of their license which can come up to like \$500 every two years and then you have a skill that you can transfer anywhere.”**

Talent Acquisition Specialist



### Fellowship and return-to-work programs take many forms.

Military spouse fellowship programs like those coordinated by [Hiring Our Heroes](#) and the Department of Defense offer twelve weeks of on-the-job training to help military spouses translate their skills to new professional environments. These programs often include educational classroom sessions and pair military spouses with manager mentors that provide one-on-one career development support.

Other programs, like [T-Mobile's Returnship](#), offer any applicant with a break in their career a six-month internship-style program to support special projects and build a network within the organization. These types of programs are not exclusive to active-duty families or spouses, opening access to National Guard and Reserve-affiliated job-seekers along with military domestic partners.



**Form groups** of military-connected employees to advise leaders about military spouse candidate potential.



**Resume review “cheat sheets”** to help translate how common volunteer skills and experiences might be relevant for positions within organizations.

## Key Takeaways

**Look for reasons to say yes**

**Sponsoring training opens doors**

**Establish military spouse advisory committees**

Step 6.



# Be a community military spouses can rely on.

Form a military spouse employee resource group (ERG) to offer peer support.



Participants were keenly aware of the **isolation** that often accompanies military spouses due to relocation and lack of military lifestyle cultural competency in their communities.

“Being a military spouse going from place to place, PCSing, if you’re going overseas, you might feel a sense of loneliness. Your husband, regardless of the branch or service, has his battle buddies, his friends, his co-workers, but she might feel like she’s out of place. So if you’re able to have that connection with them and let them know, like, hey? Once you come with us, you’re part of our team, your family.”

HR Manager



## Closing the Loop: Step 6

To help them make connections within their organizations, **participants brought military spouse employees together via online groups**. As connections formed, military spouse employee resource group (ERG) members not only supported each other, but also the organization by **identifying** other military spouse employees, **offering** referrals, and **advocating** for employee needs.

**“We created a Microsoft Teams channel internally. It’s our military spouse connections channel and you don’t get into it unless you’re a military spouse. You request entry and there’s just general postings. Where are you? Do you have questions? If you’re PCSing, anybody have any tips or tricks? We can send really quick communications out to the team. I get all kinds of referrals. When we’ve got a military spouse friendly position, I put it out to the team saying, “hey, gang! Anybody know anybody?” That gets a lot of positive responses.”**

Military Programs Director

**Online ERGs allowed employers to quickly support military spouses in times of crisis.** One participant with employees in Tennessee reported that within four hours of the news of a helicopter crash killing nine soldiers at Fort Campbell, the military spouse ERG provided the names of employees stationed there to HR staff so they could be checked on and offered support. The Military Programs Director explained the impact of these kinds of check-ins:

**“The word got out to the community like, okay these folks really care about us. They’re paying attention. It’s the little things that really help.”**



### **Offer a sponsorship program to welcome military spouses to new spaces.**

Several participants offered programs to connect military spouse employees who are relocating with local employees and partner organizations before they move.

**“Let’s say we don’t have an employee in that market. We’ll use our partners like Hiring Our Heroes or Blue Star Families and say, ‘Hey, do you have any chapters in that area? Do you have any resources? Do you have any people that we can connect this employee with?’”**

HR Specialist

These introductions help reduce some of the stress military spouse employees face assessing housing options and finding child care while managing job responsibilities. Sponsors also help military spouse employees get acquainted in new professional roles or offices.

“[A sponsor] is somebody who’s helping you find your footing as you first come in. If you’re re-entering the job market, you may not be thinking three steps ahead in your job, in your career. You’re thinking about how can I be comfortable here? So it’s somebody who sponsors you to help you find that footing.”

HR Manager

### Demonstrate military spouse appreciation with useful benefits.

While participants agreed that Military Spouse Appreciation Day is a great time to recognize employees and raise awareness about initiatives, **year-round benefits were more effective for attracting and retaining military spouse talent.** All participants’ employers offered remote work which they viewed as critical for attracting military spouse job seekers. Technological advancements and COVID-19 office closures were helpful catalysts for transitioning previously in-office jobs to remote work. In addition to keeping these roles remote, offering home office setup and teardown between moves was another thoughtful way participants’ employers supported military spouse remote workers.



**Flexibility around work structure and schedule were also important ways employers supported military spouses.**<sup>12</sup> Some employers offered contract or project-based work that could be completed when military spouses had greatest availability. Flexible working hours were also highly regarded, particularly during periods of single parenting. Free access to Care.com to find child care at new duty locations and single program opt-ins for vision and dental insurance were helpful benefits for families using the military-provided health insurance TRICARE.

### Military Spouse-Friendly Policies

**Virtual Jobs** Home Office Setup Contract Work  
**Leave Donation**  
**Child Care Benefits**  
**Flexible Scheduling**  
**Insurance Add-ons**  
**PCS Leave** Spouse-Friendly 401Ks

## Closing the Loop: Step 6

Because many military spouses do not stay with one employer long enough to take advantage of their employers' retirement plans, one participant suggested offering military spouses a reduced vesting cliff.<sup>13</sup> Flexible paid time off programs that military spouse employees could use during military relocation or family emergencies were other helpful benefits for longterm employment. Leave donation programs also empower employees to share accumulated leave in support of a military spouse team member who requires additional leave time. *The Society for Human Resource Management* offers a useful guide for [developing a leave donation program](#).

**“We don’t have them use their PTO. We give them additional days off to settle. They don’t have to start working the day that they get there. Obviously it takes time to settle in. Most of them are moms, dads, they have to get their kids settled into school. So we think about all that.”**

Vice President of Human Resources

Ultimately, participants believed that **these benefits kept military spouse employees with their companies longer** than they would have otherwise chosen or been able to stay.<sup>14</sup>

**“We have a lot of people that have been employed for over five years with the company, which nowadays is a really big milestone. There is a lot of tenure, so that’s been a really positive outcome of making sure that we are promoting our spouses, making them feel recognized, and collecting their feedback to really see what we can do to accommodate them and make sure that they are supported.”**

Veteran Program Manager



**Flexibility** around work structure and schedules are ways employers can support military spouses.



**Online ERGs** help military spouse employees **make connections** and allow employers to quickly offer **support in times of crisis**.

## Key Takeaways

**Military spouse ERGs foster connection**

**Offer remote work**

**Connect military spouses with sponsors during PCS**

Step 7.



# Share knowledge, contacts, and impact.

Because not every employer will be right for every military spouse job seeker, participants strongly encouraged their peers to **share military spouse candidates they're not able to hire**. For example, participants provided countless examples of times they reached out to HR professional peers to help military spouse employees relocating outside of their regions find a new job.

**Refer non-hires to other employers looking for military spouse talent.**



**“We’re constantly hearing, seeing, and reading about how tight the talent market is right now. There are really good people in the marketplace right now and the way to access them is to share them and share what we’re learning.”**

HR Manager

This reciprocity not only makes their jobs easier, but also **supports the overall goal of getting more military spouses hired**.

**“I’m an honest believer that if you love them enough, let them go. It may not benefit you monetarily, but I think in the long run the value that it adds to their experience. They have nothing but good things to say afterwards.”**

HR Manager



## Make word of mouth the gift that keeps on giving.

Participants explained that **creating environments conducive to military spouse employment often led to new opportunities for employers.** One participant noticed that increasing military spouse hiring also increased Veteran hiring, as happy military spouse employees shared their experiences with transitioning service members. Allowing military spouse employees to take their jobs with them also opened up new markets for employers.

**“We have an employee that moved to [state], and she’s a recruiter. She works remotely, and she is a military spouse. Our other recruiters are not that close, so it’s kind of a different traveling point where they can jump off from versus some of us being a lot further away from those locations. So we’ve used that to our advantage, kind of capitalizing on the connections that they have in the location.”**

Recruiter

Participants also advocated for **sourcing catering and merchandise from military-spouse owned small businesses** as another way to support their employment and demonstrate commitment to the military community. These actions not only raise awareness about employers’ military spouse hiring but also help the small businesses that employ military spouses grow, doubling their impact. Participants note that while these types of investments may seem short term, they are essential to moving the needle on the military spouse employment bottom line.

**“It was a hard sell to get Veteran unemployment to drop years ago. Right? We’re just 10 years behind that. It took 10 years to get where it is today [...] There’s been a ton of trailblazers really paving the way and organizations doing great work. But there’s a whole bunch more civilians out there that need to hear all of it, so that they better understand how it fits within their hiring needs.”**

Program Administrator

## Key Takeaways

**Share military spouse candidates with peer HR professionals**

**Word-of-mouth benefits military spouses and employers**

Step 8.



# Turn practice into policy.

Because participants agreed that **there is no-one-size-fits-all approach to military spouse employment**, they called for employers to codify successful programs and practices in organizational policy. Participants urged employers launching new military spouse employment programs to **dedicate significant human and financial resources to their initiatives and frequently revise their HR and employee handbooks** as new programs are developed. These formal rules empower managers, HR team members and employees to effectively advocate for military spouse needs.

**Formalize procedures and allocate resources to ensure long-term success.**



“Anybody can be “military friendly” and really encompass the friendly atmosphere, but when you’re “military ready” for a Veteran or ready for a military spouse, that means you have programs in place. Your internal employees are trained and understand the lifestyle, and we’re just 100% ready for what’s coming our way with them.”

HR Manager

## Key Takeaways

**Invest in military spouse programming**

**Policy leads to advocacy**

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