

Eugene H. Rooney, Jr. 2015 Innovative State Human Resource Management Program

“Northwest (NW) Edge”

Washington State Veteran Transition Program: Helping build a strong Washington workforce, through statewide collaboration, with talented qualified veterans.



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SUMMARY

NW Edge was created as a bridging program for transitioning service members seeking employment in Washington State. Over 10,000 service members transition from active duty at Washington military installations each year, and about 40% remain in the state. The Washington State Department of Veteran's Affairs reports that an additional 13,000 return to Washington annually from across the nation. The Department of Defense (DoD) requires each transitioning service member to complete a five day transition program which provides fast-paced, high-level transition workshops. Washington's Office of the State HR Director (WA SHR) and Joint Base Lewis-McChord's (JBLM) Soldier for Life-Transition Assistance Program (SFL-TAP) combined efforts in November of 2013, to evaluate gaps within the mandatory DoD curriculum. After reviewing the DoD program and interviewing service members who completed the program, we determined Washington could provide more effective assistance to those individuals who remained in Washington. WA SHR and JBLM's SFL-TAP convened stakeholders from seven agencies, veteran service organizations (VSO's) and the University of Washington to develop a more detailed transition curriculum. This model curriculum includes multiple workshops and labs providing an employment "edge" to veterans. The program assists veterans to become more competitive when applying for civilian employment by empowering and educating them on translating military skill sets for civilian occupations. The first NW Edge cohort was launched in January 2014, and 5 pilot cohorts have successfully completed the program.

Brief Description of NW Edge: NW Edge participants meet one day a week for seven weeks.

The program combines instructor led workshops and employment labs which build upon one another each week. The curriculum was built through the collaborative efforts of eight organizations, each bringing their own expertise. WA SHR is a co-facilitator of NW Edge along with Private and Public Partnership Office-US Army Reserve Corp. The curriculum consists of the following workshops: Washington State's Seven Target Industry Sectors, Organizational Discourse, How to Crack the State and Federal Codes, Resume Tailoring, Interview Savvy, How to Present Yourself Professionally, and a panel from Washington State's Veteran Employee Resource Group (VERG) . The program also includes employment labs, mock interviews, and the NW Edge Social (attended by private and public sector HR practitioners and hiring managers).



Why NW Edge was created? A main purpose in creating this program was to support Governor Inslee's Executive Order on Veterans Employment (EO 13-01), and Goal Five of the Governor's "Results Washington" agenda on making state government more efficient, effective and accountable. EO 13-01 charges all agencies with assisting veterans through their transition from military to civilian employment, while Goal Five includes strategies for making state government an "Employer of Choice". NW Edge supports both efforts by simultaneously providing transition assistance, building the state brand, and giving state government early access to talented qualified veterans.

How is NW Edge new and creative? NW Edge allows several organizations across jurisdictions and sectors to pool limited resources and collaborate, creating one unified program to assist transitioning veterans. Partners include WA SHR, Private and Public Partnership Office-US Army Reserves, WA State Department of Veterans Affairs, Boots to Shoes, Thurston County Economic Development Council, University of Washington and JBLM's SFL-TAP. Furthermore, as an early adopter, state government was able to both get early access to job candidates, and become an anchor for other employers that weren't prepared to take an early risk on the program.

NW Edge's start-up cost: NW Edge did not have a monetary start-up cost. In-kind support has been provided from partners, including state recruiters organized through WA SHR, and members of the Washington State Veterans Employee Resource Group.

NW Edge's operational cost: NW Edge does not have a monetary operational cost. Through the above mentioned collaboration, the JBLM SFL-TAP provides all operational support.

NW Edge Funding: There is not a requirement for funding this program.

Did NW Edge originate in Washington? Yes, the Department of Defense (DoD) mandates that service members complete a five day transition assistance program (TAP), but this program does not offer a curriculum as comprehensive as NW Edge. TAP provides a high-level overview for service members transitioning off of active duty. NW Edge compliments this program by providing extensive workshops and employment labs. DoD has recognized NW Edge as a model bridging program, and is interested in scaling the program out to other military installations across the country.

Are there NW Edge programs in other states? We are aware of transition programs provided by VSO's and private organizations that offer individual workshops, but we are not aware of other programs that incorporate all workshops and employment labs with no fees associated.

NW Edge quantitative analysis: During our 2014 pilot year, 146 service members across all branches of service participated in NW Edge. As of today, 43% are known to have accepted livable wage positions and 18% have been accepted into some type of fellowship/OJT program. The majority of state agencies have incorporated NW Edge into their veteran recruitment strategy, and out of the 65 participants who have been hired, 21 were hired by the state.

Pilot Year Data

	Pilot Year Participants	Hired by the State	Employed	Higher Education	Still on Active Duty	Fellowship Program	Formal/Informal Interviews
Totals	146	21	65	4	31	32	146
		14%	43%	3%	20%	18%	100%

NW Edge Plus, pilot to permanent: This program was piloted in 2014 to ensure the finalized curriculum bridged the transition gap in Washington State. After each cohort, we conducted end of program reviews with participants and the employers who assisted with the employment labs. This helped to determine which areas of the curriculum were most and least useful. We then revised the curriculum based on feedback. Analysis indicates that NW Edge has a solid curriculum which bridges the veteran transition gap. We are currently expanding the program throughout Washington, and have requests to facilitate new pilots at NW Navy Region and Fairchild Air Force Base.