

Recruiting veterans for local government jobs

Localities discover the benefits of partnering with Virginia Values Veterans

MORE THAN 20 cities, towns and counties have made a formal commitment to recruit veterans for their administration, police and fire departments, sheriff's office and other types of jobs. By partnering with Virginia Values Veterans (V3), they have learned that hiring veterans gives them a competitive edge in workforce development and can even attract businesses to their region.

Since becoming certified with V3 in 2012, the City of Norfolk has hired more than 250 veterans while the Norfolk Sheriff's Office hired an additional 100 veterans. In the past three years, Chesterfield County has hired more than 250 vets. In Loudoun County, the Sheriff's Office alone has hired almost 50 vets.

Founded in 2012, Virginia Values Veterans is a Virginia Department of Veterans Services program that helps employers understand, design, and implement nationally recognized

“Generally veterans have been through a crucible of training and experiences that have helped them to develop discipline and leadership skills that are difficult to measure but invaluable to employers.”

- Bonnie Baker, Military and Veteran Affairs, City of Norfolk

best practices in recruiting, hiring, and retaining veterans.

The program is free to join and approved by the Society for HR Management for continuing education credits. Just six



Sheriff Michael Chapman (left) and Sergeant Barry Dufek of the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office recruit veterans for civilian staff as well as field and correctional deputies. Recruiting officers go to job fairs at military bases like Quantico and Camp Lejeune to connect with soldiers transitioning from active duty.



Pete Garner

Job Title: Civil Engineer Officer, City of Norfolk

Branch: U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force

Years of Service: 23.5

Deployments: Kansas, Missouri, Virginia, Kuwait, Southwest Asia

“The City of Norfolk is very open to hiring veterans and tries to do so whenever possible. It’s great serving the citizens of this city since so many of them are currently in the military, retired or support the military as civilians.”

hours of training can certify HR staff and other officials in how to recruit, train and retain veterans.

The training helps employers gain “veteran cultural competency,” according to Andrew Schwartz, program manager of Virginia Values Veterans. HR professionals “have to know the mindset of the veteran to set them up for success. We teach HR staff to build a case for why vets improve productivity and efficiency.”

Knowing how to recruit veterans is essential in a city like Norfolk where, every year, more than 10,000 military personnel stationed in Hampton Roads transition from active duty to civilian life.

“We are working hard to make Norfolk a fantastic home for military and their families and this is one tool we use,” says Bonnie Baker with the city’s Department of Development, Military and Veteran Affairs office. A retired Colonel herself, Baker says the transitioning service members from the military make Norfolk “a great place to do business because we have a ready pool” of skilled workers.

Baker says veterans make great hires for many reasons. “Generally veterans have been through a crucible of training and experiences that have helped them to develop discipline and leadership skills that are difficult to measure but invaluable to employers.”

Sergeant Barry Dufek of Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office agrees. “Veterans’ tactical and leadership experience are a great asset. And they typically have a great work ethic.”

Of the roughly 50 veterans hired in the past three years, Dufek says they fill a variety of position from civilian staff to field deputies and correctional deputies.

Unlike Norfolk, where there is a large local pool of transitioning military, the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office has to go farther to connect with veterans. The Sheriff’s Office has a supplemental recruiting unit that travels to locations like Quantico, Va., and Camp Lejeune, N.C. to participate in job fairs.

“Our agency is in competition with many other agencies in NOVA, so we try to find transitioning soldiers looking for law enforcement careers,” says Dufek.

He says the department tries to send recruiters with military backgrounds to bases in their branch of the military – Marine to Marine and Army to Army, for example.

“These current employees can relate to soldiers and provide good information about why our department is a great place to work,” says Dufek.

The Governor’s office and the General Assembly have put additional resources into veteran workforce development. In 2015, the General Assembly appropriated \$100,000 to develop a pilot program specifically for internships and on-the-job training for transitioning service members.

Likewise, the Department of Defense issued a directive allowing military installation commanders to release transitioning servicemen and women to train in the private sector for up to six months prior to the end of their military service. Virginia is the first state to have a liaison between the military installations and private companies and municipalities to help facilitate these opportunities.

In addition to helping local veterans find good jobs, Virginia Values Veterans is also helping the state to attract new talent to Virginia. “We can advertise to transitioning members worldwide bringing them to Virginia for hard-to-fill jobs,” says Schwartz.

By providing attractive employment to more veterans, Virginia develops a stronger workforce and, in turn, can attract businesses to our state. It’s a win-win. 

About the author

Nancy Chafin is editor for Virginia Town & City.