



# **Educating Disabled Veterans and Employers about Workplace Rights and Responsibilities National Online Dialogue**

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**November 20 – December 15, 2017  
Final Summary Report**



## **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Dialogue Metrics .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Ideas Contributed by Dialogue Participants .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Map of Demographics of United States Visits .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Outreach and Registration Metrics .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Total Dialogue Outreach Emails.....	11
Total Tweets.....	11
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>12</b>

## **Introduction**

ePolicyWorks is home to a thriving online community through which the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) hosts a series of online dialogues to inform policymaking efforts related to the employment of people with disabilities. In celebration of National Veterans and Military Families Month, ODEP partnered with DOL's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), to gather ideas on how the federal government can better reach disabled veterans and educate employers in an effort to reduce the number of disability discrimination complaints, and to ensure that all veterans avoid job loss and other workplace hardships. Input collected during the dialogue will play an integral role in the Federal Government's efforts to develop resources and materials to enhance the understanding of workplace protections for disabled veterans.

The following report outlines the results of the dialogue, "[Educating Disabled Veterans and Employers about Workplace Rights and Responsibilities](#)." This virtual effort—held from November 20 to December 15, 2017—invited individuals and organizations that represent disabled veterans to participate and share their perspectives. This included Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and employer groups, as well as stakeholder groups, including vocational rehabilitation and similar service providers that help veterans with disabilities find and retain work, and training providers for veteran transition programs.

This dialogue was divided into two main topics:

- 1. Educating Employers**
- 2. Reaching Disabled Veterans**

Participants were asked to keep the following questions in mind when commenting on these topics and voting on submitted ideas:

- *How should agencies target outreach to reach employers regarding the hiring and retention of disabled veterans?*
- *What form should information take to reach these groups (classes, on-line chats, meetings with Veteran Service Organizations, employer groups, etc.)?*
- *Are there unique issues that EEOC, ODEP or VETS should address or be aware of when conducting outreach on employer responsibilities in the workplace?*
- *Are there conditions that the agency should address specifically in its materials (e.g., PTSD, anatomical loss, others)?*

- *How should agencies target outreach to reach disabled veterans who are in or looking to join the workforce?*
- *What form should information take to reach these groups (classes, on-line chats, meetings with VSO groups, etc.)?*
- *What form should information take to reach these groups (classes, on-line chats, meetings with VSO groups, etc.)?*
- *Are there conditions that the agency should address specifically in its materials (e.g., PTSD, anatomical loss, others)?*

Included in this report is information about dialogue participants, outreach conducted during the dialogue, and ideas contributed and voted on by participants. An archive of the complete dialogue is available for viewing at [VETS.ePolicyWorks.org](http://VETS.ePolicyWorks.org).

*Note: The following section outlines the key metrics from the online dialogue and provides a snapshot of the participation results.*

## **Dialogue Metrics**

- Dialogue opened on Monday, November 20, 2017 at 8:00 am ET
- Dialogue closed on Friday, December 15, 2017 at 11:59 pm ET
- Total Unique Visitors: 590
- Total Visits: 776 (17% from Social Media)
- Total Page Views: 2,090
- Average Pages per visit: 2.69
- Average Duration per visit: 2:54
- Total Registrants: 39
- Total Ideas: 8
- Total Comments: 40
- Total Votes: 6



### **Educating Employers Topic**

- Total Ideas: 6
- Total Comments: 29
- Total Votes: 3

### **Reaching Disabled Veterans Topic**

- Total Ideas: 2
- Total Comments: 11
- Total Votes: 3

## **Ideas Contributed by Dialogue Participants**

*The following ideas were submitted by registrants during the dialogue (For a full text of ideas, including comments, visit VETS.ePolicyWorks.org):*

### **1. Employers Are Often Unaware, Representatives Can Explain at A Local Job Fair (Educating Employers Topic)**

*3 votes, 11 comments and 4 followers*

It seems to me that Employers are often unaware of the benefits related to hiring military veterans. To help get the word out, I suggest DOL designates representatives in each Region to send to job fairs. Job fairs take place very frequently across the nation. The representative can go from booth to booth, networking and explaining the benefits to companies in a face-to-face fashion. These representatives also need to reach out to the VA hospitals and clinics in their areas and educate the employees on the programs available to assist veterans in finding jobs, so that the VA employees can in turn pass the information on to the Veterans.

### **2. Possible ways to education disabled veterans (Reaching Disabled Veterans Topic)**

*3 votes, 7 comments and 3 followers*

Although the discussion is related to disabled veterans, we are still looking at individuals with disabilities who are looking to join the workforce and if they are not looking for a job in the public sector, they going to work in the private sector. Every state has a state agency that assists in providing workforce placement to people with disabilities; the federal government has the Veteran's Administration. Any agency, private or public, receiving federal monies, benefits, or tax cuts should have some training on EEO, ADA, and other issues related to hiring veterans with disabilities. In the line of work as a mental health/rehabilitation counselor, I provide education to disabled individuals and managers/supervisors referred through EAP on workplace issue as it relates to discrimination or workplace bullying. I would therefore purpose that veterans working with mental health or rehab counselors received education on issues of ADA, EEO, and other issues within the course of receiving such services. Understanding the issues prior to attempting to get into the workforce builds more self-esteem in the individual as they know their rights as a person with disabilities. There should be information factoids written in nonprofessionals' terms, easily understandable fact sheets provided online, in classes, or meetings with VSO groups. Every person is not computer savvy; therefore, a telephone ombudsman providing verbal information could be an option. Many disabled veterans attend church or community organization functions that could house factoids or fact sheets.

In terms of disabling conditions, depressive disorders, PTSD, anatomical loss, and grief are some of the most important ones that should be addressed in the educational plan. I take mental health cases from Give an Hour and those that I have taken all include the issues above. I give them an education on those issues and provide information so that they can read up on the conditions for their own knowledge. Knowing about the condition helps to make better decision on getting the proper care needed to get better.

### **3. Veterans with Hearing Disabilities** (Educating Employers Topic)

*0 votes, 8 comments and 2 followers*

I am a veteran who suffers from service connected hearing loss. I receive hearing aids and other support from the VA Hospital to help minimize the effects of my disability. My experience at work is that subtle disabilities or those not easily seen are often overlooked by employers causing us to have to regularly remind or ask our employers for consideration in making accommodations. For example, I frequently am required to attend meetings and social functions where the environment is difficult for those with hearing loss to effectively engage others in conversation. Although my attendance is required as part of my job, any accommodation that would help me hear better typically rest with me where, if possible, I sit closer to the speaker, turn up the volume of my hearing aids or sit in part of the room that limits background noise. There is typically little if any consideration by the employer to limit background noise, provide effective amplification devices, or choose venues that are more conducive to hearing people talk. I feel it would benefit the employers more in the way of productivity, morale and inclusion if they were more aware to ensure they accommodate for those hard of hearing. Most agencies have come a long way in accommodating those who are deaf with sign language interpreters and closed captioning, but I feel that more needs to be done for those who are not deaf but struggle to hear every day.

### **4. Veterans Outreach and Benefits Coordinator** (Educating Employers Topic)

*0 votes, 3 comments and 2 followers*

I believe that employers including my own employer do not involve outreach or hire a vet to signify that they even hire veterans.

I am aware that I am the only veteran on staff my employer only hires employees that are ex-junkies, alcoholics or some sort of substance abuser. I also believe I am being discriminated against as a retired disabled veteran. So much more is needed to help eligible disabled veterans seek employment here.

## **5. Focus on PTSG Not PTSD (Educating Employers Topic)**

*0 votes, 2 comments and 2 followers*

"There is also something called post traumatic growth where you come out of a situation like that and you actually feel kinder toward your fellow man and fellow woman." - Secretary of Defense James Mattis

Our society has built a stigma around Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; this stigma has made it common for people (to include employers) that someone who is diagnosed with PTSD is permanently damaged. However, in most cases, Veterans who come out of the service experience what Gen. Mattis describes as Post Traumatic Growth; meaning that service members, in one way or another, experience extreme circumstances that help them grow as an individual. Veterans (both combat and non-combat), have a unique outlook on problems and can foster great results when they are members of a productive team. In hindsight, to eliminate this mystified stigma that the veteran community is damaged, employers could help be the change needed to bring veterans back into a positive light by focusing on their growth instead of their disorder. To do this, employers must recognize and accept that: 1) PTSD is treatable; 2) being diagnosed with PTSD does not mean you are going to "snap"; 3) Veterans have leadership skills implemented in them that can carry your team to new heights; 4) to get the most out of a hired veteran, understand and work with VA medical appointments. There is no question that trauma can change a person, however, if placed into the right environment trauma will allow an individual to grow and in turn, helps an organization flourish to its highest potential. Employers hold the key to growth, it's time they unlock the door.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/nation/2014/05/05/mattis-iraq-afghanistan-marines-usmc/8632093/>

## **6. Compensated Work Therapy Program through the VA (Educating Employers Topic)**

*0 votes, 3 comments and 3 followers*

My husband is a disabled veteran and he has told me about a program that the VA currently has called CWT. The CWT program stands for Compensated Work Therapy. From the VA website this is the mission of the program: "The mission of CWT services is to provide support to Veterans living with mental illness or physical impairment with barriers to employment to secure and maintain community based competitive employment. Veterans are not required to be service connected to be eligible for CWT services. To be considered for participation in the CWT program, a Veteran must be eligible to receive VA healthcare services, have a goal of a return to competitive employment and have barriers to obtaining and/or retaining employment which requires the intensive supports provided by one of the CWT service components."

I think that encouraging this type of support or creating a program in all areas of employment would be beneficial to all veterans.

#### **7. Employers and Justice Involved Veterans with Disabilities** (Educating Employers Topic)

*0 votes, 2 comments and 1 follower*

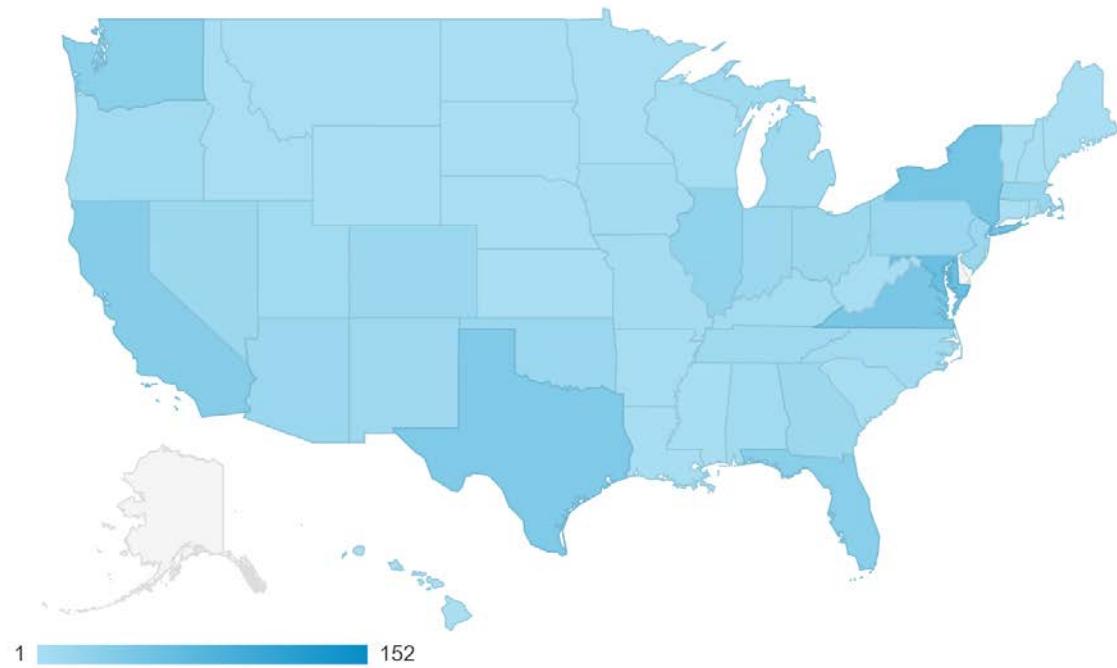
Nearly one-third of the adult working age population in the United States has a criminal record. While quality employment is the single most important factor in preventing recidivism, employers are often reluctant to hire formerly court-involved applicants, including veterans and those with disabling conditions. Despite EEOC guidance, justice involved veterans with disabilities are often turned away and denied a job interview by employers solely because they have a criminal background. Among the strategies to combat such discrimination, like Ban the Box, are approaches that can build bridges with employers to help employers implement policies consistent with EEOC guidance. The federal government can lead and fund local efforts that bring business leaders, government officials and workforce intermediaries together to improve the job prospects of justice involved veterans with disabilities. Educating employers begins with a dialogue, supported by useful tools, expert facilitation and the views of those with lived experience. Local events that bring employers, officials, veterans and workforce experts together to address this hiring problem is one strategy to help change the experience of our veterans with disabilities. It is worth a targeted investment.

#### **8. Making Suicide Prevention the Top Priority** (Reaching Disabled Veterans Topic)

*0 votes, 4 comments and 1 follower*

Well, I have many ideas to contribute to this forum. Firstly, let me begin with the fact that the profession of psychiatry in the USA is sorely lacking. From the research I've gathered on the internet about the field of psychiatry, I have learned that most psychiatrists in the US do not wish to work for \$70 per hour of therapy session, rather, they are demanding upwards of \$200 per hour. Unfortunately, the health insurance companies covering these veterans prohibit such exorbitant fees from being served to the veteran. Hence, as a result, these veterans end up with no counselling, which is the reason they are committing suicide at an alarming rate. Why isn't anyone in government putting a cap to these psychiatrists' fees or developing a national program for everyone to benefit, especially the client and of course, you would like to keep the psychiatrists happy provided they come down to earth with their demands. Is training more psychologists or psychiatric nurses the answer? This idea must be analyzed very seriously. Several years ago, I approached someone in charge of social work at the US Navy with my idea to design a brand-new system for suicide prevention, given that I'm a computer engineer. However, that person shrugged off my suggestion and told me that there are systems already in place for that sort of thing. Ironically, following that, people still kept killing themselves....as we heard on the news.

## Map of Demographics of United States Visits



<b>State</b>	<b>Number of Visitors</b>
District of Columbia	152
Maryland	59
New York	49
Virginia	45
Texas	39
California	34
Florida	31
Washington	29
Illinois	24
Massachusetts	17
Indiana	16
Oklahoma	16
Pennsylvania	16
Arizona	15
Colorado	15
New Jersey	15
Georgia	14
Nevada	14
Ohio	14
New Mexico	13
Michigan	11
Tennessee	11
Utah	9
Alabama	8

<b>State</b>	<b>Number of Visitors</b>
Oregon	8
Kentucky	7
Iowa	6
Missouri	6
Wisconsin	5
Arkansas	4
West Virginia	4
Louisiana	3
Mississippi	3
New Hampshire	3
South Carolina	3
Vermont	3
Idaho	2
Minnesota	2
Montana	2
Rhode Island	2
Connecticut	1
Hawaii	1
Kansas	1
Maine	1
North Dakota	1
Nebraska	1
South Dakota	1
Wyoming	1
Unknown	9

## **Outreach and Registration Metrics**

In order to engage a broad range of participants in the ePolicyWorks online dialogues, our team engages in a multitude of strategic outreach efforts, including emails and social media posts.

Email blasts are sent to previous ePolicyWorks dialogue participants and key stakeholders in the current dialogue topics. Our outreach strategy is critical to informing and shaping the conversation in every online dialogue, ensuring that the right people are brought to the table to contribute.

### **Total Dialogue Outreach Emails**

- Email Blasts – 4
- Emails Delivered – 9,840
- Emails Opened – 1640 (16.67% open rate)

### **Total Tweets**

- Original tweets pointing to the online dialogue – 12
- Retweets regarding the online dialogue - 5

## **Conclusion**

Through the dialogue titled, *Educating Disabled Veterans and Employers about Workplace Rights and Responsibilities*, ODEP and its partners at VETS and EEOC successfully leveraged leading-edge crowdsourcing tools to engage individuals and organizations interested in participating in a robust conversation related to how to help federal agencies better reach disabled veterans, and the employers who hire them, to ensure that they understand their workplace rights and responsibilities under federal law. These efforts are intended to decrease the occurrence of employment discrimination against veterans with disabilities and improve their employment opportunities.

In summary, the online event attracted more than 590 visitors who posted 8 ideas and 40 comments. The discussions taking place in the dialogue illustrate that collaboration and crowdsourcing with key stakeholders are imperative for the advancement and development of best practices to support the employment of veterans with disabilities. The input from the participants in the dialogue will play an integral role in helping refine the Federal Government's outreach efforts, with a goal of reducing the occurrence of employment discrimination against veterans with disabilities, and arming them with the information that they need to protect their rights.