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The Governor's Veterans  
Education Task Force



*A strategic plan to make Tennessee the number one state in the country for Veteran educational achievement and employment*

Presented on  
**August 27, 2014**

# Task Force Members

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# Executive Summary

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On November 14, 2013, Governor Haslam announced the formation of the Veterans Education Task Force with the charge to identify common educational hurdles for transitioning veterans, research the best practices to serve student veterans and to make recommendations on improving opportunities for veterans to earn a certificate or degree beyond high school.

The Governor's Veterans Education Task Force met monthly from January to May 2014. These discussions included best practices, student Veteran testimonials as well as existing and future program initiatives for consideration.

The monthly deliberations included meetings at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, University of Memphis and the offices of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission in Nashville. The agendas and notes from each meeting are included in this briefing.

Each campus meeting included testimonials from student Veterans, representatives from Student Veteran Centers and Organizations as well as briefings regarding student Veteran programs experiencing success in Veteran recruitment and retention.

During the process to research and develop strategies, the Task Force voted unanimously to support the Tennessee Veterans Education Support Act or Tennessee VETS Act. The act allows eligible Veterans classified as out-of-state students to pay in-state tuition. On July 1, 2014, Tennessee joined 24 other states to offer in-state tuition through Public Chapter No. 612. The Tennessee VETS Act also created the VETS Campus designation which signifies the pertinent campus has meet six criteria to recruit, support and retain student Veterans to degree completion. The Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs (TDVA) legislative liaison individually met with legislators to offer insight regarding the need for the benefit. The Task Force unanimously voted to send a formal letter of support to legislators which was sent by TDVA in February, 2014. The full legislation and letter of support are included in this briefing.

Tennessee is home to 521,267 Veterans who receive \$1.9 billion a year in tax-free federal benefits to include \$237 million in educational benefits. Approximately eight percent of Tennessee's Veterans are between the ages of 18 and 34 years old with another 27 percent between the ages of 25 and 54 years old. Currently, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs places Tennessee in the bottom ten in the country in regards to Veteran population under 25 years old.

***The Task Force believes improved access to higher education and innovative support resources will make Tennessee more attractive to college-aged Veterans interested in pursuing a college degree.***

# Executive Summary

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According to the United States Census Bureau American Community Survey of 2012, 35 percent of Tennessee's Veteran population have some college or an Associate's Degree and 23 percent have a Bachelor's Degree or higher.

The State of Tennessee is experiencing a sharp increase in the number of Veterans attending public, private, not for profit and for profit institutions. The full research document is included in this briefing.

Type of Higher Education Institution	2008	2013	Increase	Percentage
Public four year institutions	1,841	4,404	2,563	139%
Public two year institutions	230	413	183	80%
Not for profit private institutions	436	2,454	2,018	462%
For profit institutions	527	1,689	1,162	220%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,034</b>	<b>8,960</b>	<b>5,926</b>	<b>195%</b>

Since the Post 9/11 GI Bill federal benefit can be transferred to spouses and dependent children, the data is an estimation of the student Veteran population. However, the suggested recommendations require institutions to track the student Veteran population, majors popular among student Veterans and graduation rates.

Each Post 9/11 Veteran has access to approximately \$107,830 in educational benefits which will fund approximately 36 months.

First two semesters are critical to the transitional stage from service member to student Veteran. Approximately 77 percent of Veterans require remedial courses due to an extended period of time between high school and college courses. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs changed the funding criteria for remedial courses, making more than 1,000 community college student Veterans ineligible for GI Bill benefits.

# Executive Summary

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The Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits:

- Calculated based on Veterans' amount of active duty service following September 11, 2001
- Cost of tuition and fees are paid directly to school, capped at the rate of the most expensive undergraduate tuition in the state
- Monthly housing stipend paid at the rate of service member residing in the same zip code with a rank of E-5
- Annual payment of \$1,000 for books and supplies
- Relocation funds for Veterans residing in rural areas
- Benefits are transferrable to dependents after 6 years of service

Although the Post 9/11 GI Bill is more comprehensive than the original GI Bill created in 1944 and the Montgomery GI Bill created in 1987, the historic backlogs for the federal educational benefit have caused critical delays for student Veterans.

Student Veterans expressed other challenges to include:

- Feelings of isolation-*transition from a military unit where everyone wears the same uniform and speaks the same military language*
- Cultural change-*transition from life-threatening situations which require mature approaches*
- Loss of organizational identity-*transition from a close-knit military unit environment*
- Physical and psychological stressors-*service-connected physical and psychological injuries incurred during military service*
- Financial insecurity-*transition from contract service with a consistent bi-monthly paycheck to unemployment or uncertain employment*
- Family stress-*full time service member to unemployed full time student or part time student can cause tension*
- Uncertainty on process to access higher education-*Veterans unsure on how to access education benefits or the process to apply to institutions and they may get frustrated with too much information or not enough information*

The Helping Heroes Grant Program was established in 2008. The grant offers 375 eligible veterans on a first-come, first-serve basis either \$500 or \$1,000 to students completing at least twelve (12) semester hours each term. The grant has never been maxed out with 375 eligible veterans receiving the state benefit due to a lack of knowledge regarding the benefit.

# Executive Summary

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On May 12, 2014, the Task Force presented three proposed strategies to Tennessee Board of Regents Chancellor Dr. John Morgan, Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association President Dr. Claude Pressnell, Jr. and University of Tennessee President Dr. Joe DiPietro to gather impressions, feedback and determine acceptance viability. Unanimous support of each recommendation was expressed by the attendees.

**Strategy 1:** Establish an annual Veterans Training Academy for higher education institution faculty and staff

**Strategy 2:** Competitive funding grant to motivate innovative programs to recruit and retain student Veterans to degree completion

**Strategy 3:** Creation of a comprehensive online educational resource to include a program to show the transfer of military service to college credits

The approach of these strategies will be complementary and will also serve to set Tennessee apart as the first state to take this comprehensive approach to higher education for Veterans. Each strategy will complement the Task Force objectives to raise awareness, create a support network and develop strategic outreach. Although baseline accurate data is currently lacking, each of the strategies will also motivate accurate data collection to be shared statewide which will reveal gaps and potential solutions.

Area of Focus	Objective
Raise Awareness	The objective of the Task Force is to raise awareness among higher education institutions regarding the challenges of student Veterans while finding ways to exchange best practices as well as creating new innovative ways to increase access to educational resources and support.
Create a Support Network	The objective of the Task Force is to communicate the need for a support network which starts with the staff, faculty and administration and continues with a Student Veteran Organization and Student Veteran Center.
Develop Strategic Outreach	The objective of the Task Force is to develop strategic outreach through a statewide higher education Veteran network and a comprehensive online resource.

Summaries and power point presentations for each recommendation are included in this briefing.

# Veteran Education Academy

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The mission of the Veteran Education Academy will be to provide structured training for the faculty, staff and leaders of Tennessee's colleges and universities and ensure all campuses have a cadre of personnel familiar with Veteran issues and prepared to lead their institutional efforts for Veteran success.

Student Veterans repeatedly addressed the Task Force to communicate a need to train faculty, staff and leaders in regards to the language, needs and challenges facing this unique population. Due to the previous structure of military environments as well as the hazards of combat duty and other factors that force maturity among service members, the transition from military life to classroom culture can be challenging for Veterans. The inability to relate to other college-aged students as well as insensitive questions and comments can force a Veteran to retreat from the higher education classroom setting. However, annual training of university and college personnel could improve communications, outreach and support of this population which has been found to be valuable to campuses and classrooms.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission is the lead organizer for the Veteran Training Academy which is recommended to be conducted annually for no less than five years with a reassessment of the program in 2019.

## **PROJECT OVERVIEW:**

- The Veteran Education Academy will be a one-day training session at a centralized location. The inaugural training event will be hosted at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville.
- All public institutions will have the opportunity to send a three person team from each campus to include:
  - 1) Senior Campus Leader such as a President or Vice President-mandatory
  - 2) Student affairs personnel involved with serving Veterans
  - 3) Student Veterans Organization Leader
- Private institutions will be allotted three person teams as well.
- TAICS will be allotted 20 slots to be distributed across pertinent campuses.

## **KEY TRAINING OUTCOMES:**

Institutions will leave the Veteran Education Academy with the following knowledge:

- 1) Understand the basics of student Veteran demographics and Veteran educational benefits
- 2) Understand challenges facing student Veterans
- 3) Understand best practices in serving student Veterans
- 4) Develop a preliminary institutional action plan for serving student Veterans

# Veteran Education Academy (continued)

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## **LOGISTICS OVERVIEW:**

- The Veteran Education Academy will offer training for approximately 150 attendees.
- Presenters will include resource experts for sessions and facilitation such as:
  - 1) American Council on Education
  - 2) Student Veterans of America
  - 3) Selected Tennessee Veteran experts
- Venue requirements are:
  - 1) Low cost or free and located in Middle Tennessee
  - 2) Capable of hosting one plenary session and four break-out sessions
  - 3) On-site catering
- All attendees will leave with a handbook to be produced by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission or adapted from existing source.
- Approximate cost of the Veteran Training Academy is \$10,000. THEC has identified existing funds for the inaugural session.

## **AGENDA OVERVIEW:**

**Opening Session** would include key leader remarks to convey the State of Tennessee's commitment to student Veteran success. It is preferable for Governor Bill Haslam to offer these introductory comments.

**Concurrent Sessions** are designed to allow institutional teams to gain broad understanding of the following topics:

- 1) Student Veteran Overview and Perspectives to include a student Veteran panel.
- 2) Building a Veteran Supportive Campus: Strategies that Work (two sessions)
- 3) Special Challenges in Serving the Student Veteran which will include information about Post-Traumatic Stress, Traumatic Brain Injury and transitional readjustment information.

**Institutional Session:** Institutions work in small groups to identify areas of growth for their campus in serving student Veterans and develop an institutional action plan.

This is the most crucial session of the day. Roving facilitation, as well as a structured rubric will be utilized to ensure a deliverable plan for each campus is produced.

# Veteran Education Academy (continued)

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## **AGENDA OVERVIEW (CONTINUED):**

During the *Closing Session*, selected institutions will share action plans, final thoughts and follow-up will be discussed.

## **ESTIMATED COSTS:**

1) Venue space (Donated by APSU)	\$1,700
2) Catering (Breakfast/Lunch)	\$4,041
3) Printing (Campus Veteran Services Handbook)	\$2,700
4) Resource Expert Travel	\$2,000
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$8,741</b>

## **KEY OUTCOMES:**

- Institutional Action Plans submitted to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and the Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs within 90 days of the Veterans Training Academy session.
- One hundred percent of public institutions attain VETS Campus status in accordance with Public Chapter No. 612.
- Qualitative survey of student Veterans to be carried out within one year of the inaugural Veterans Training Academy.

# Veteran Forward Grant

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Competition naturally creates an environment to improve current policies and practices as well as inspire innovation to create a new standard for others to strive towards. Although several administrators, staff and faculty at Tennessee higher education institutions have identified gaps in services and support to student Veterans, limited resources can prohibit the ability to address shortcomings. However, competing for grants to address weakness or to improve established processes is commonplace for institutions. This recommendation would establish a grant that would focus on improving support and services to student Veterans.

The establishment of this grant would also create another data collection resource and requirement which would serve the institution as well as the state.

## **PROJECT OVERVIEW:**

The purpose of the Veteran Forward Grant is to foster the development of innovative and best practices in Veteran access to and success in higher education in Tennessee. The competitive grant will also create a repository of these practices for Veteran higher education in the State of Tennessee. The grant would be allocated as needed based on the applications.

Funding for this program would be sought not only from state sources, but external philanthropic groups as well. The grant would be allocated based on the quality and strength of institutional applications.

The grants will be awarded on a competitive basis from three categories:

- 1) Programs which aim to innovate the way Veterans gain access to higher education
- 2) Programs which aim to expand resources to recruit or support student Veterans
- 3) Programs which aim to improve access to higher education and educational resources

## **ELIGIBLE INSTITUTIONS:**

Regionally accredited, non-profit two year and four year institutions as well as Tennessee College of Applied Technology campuses.

## **GRANT ADMINISTRATION:**

The grant will be jointly administered by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs.

# Veteran Forward Grant (Continued)

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## **PROPOSED APPLICATION TIMELINE:**

September 2015	Request For Proposal (RFP) goes out
January 2016	Applications due
April 2016	Announcement of winners
June 2016	Training
July 2016	Distribution of funds

## **SELECTION COMMITTEE:**

The selection committee will include members of the Governor's Veteran Education Task Force as well as representatives from the University of Tennessee, Tennessee Board of Regents and Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association.

## **APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS:**

- Institutions must provide baseline institutional data for Veterans in the following categories:
  - 1) Enrollment
  - 2) GPA
  - 3) Retention
  - 4) Graduation rates
- Institutions must apply for the grant through their sponsored research office or equivalent and must be able to show institutional awareness and support.
- Applications must demonstrate a sustainability plan for programs.
- Grant applications must address a particular need at an institution.
- This grant cannot be the only funding source for the program; institutions must match the grant by at least 25 percent.
- Grants that partner with other institutions, particularly two year institutions and Tennessee College of Applied Technology campus are encouraged.

# Veteran Forward Grant (Continued)

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## **GRANT RECIPIENT REQUIREMENTS:**

Recipients must share results of funded programs with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs within 40 days of the end of the fiscal year.

Recipients must provide updated institutional data for Veterans in the following categories:

- 1) Enrollment
- 2) GPA
- 3) Retention
- 4) Graduation rates

## **SAMPLE PROGRAMS WITH ESTIMATED COSTS:**

*The costs of the proposed programs are dependent on the complexity.*

Veteran resource support center on campus	\$40,000
Full-time staff person to work with Veterans	\$55,000 plus benefits
Mentoring programs for Veterans	\$10,000-\$20,000
Military coin for graduating Veterans	\$5,000 (500 coins)
Summer remediation programs	\$40,000
Release time so faculty can develop academic programs	\$15,000

## **LEGISLATION REQUIRED:**

The Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs will propose draft legislation in partnership with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and Dr. Hilary Stallings Miller of Middle Tennessee State University.

# Comprehensive Veteran Web Portal

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The mission of the comprehensive Veteran web portal is to give Veterans a quick and easy way to connect with educational programs, jobs and business resources all in one location. This one-stop approach will include checklists to assist Veterans with the process to access federal educational benefits, find the campus that meets their educational and career path needs, find out how their military credits will translate into college credits and compare services, programs and resources available at campuses across the state.

This proposed three pronged web portal will further support the Governor's Veteran Education Task Force strategic plan to make Tennessee the number one state in the country for Veteran educational achievement and employment.

## **PROJECT OVERVIEW:**

The comprehensive Veteran web portal will be called Next Chapter TN (NextChapterTN.gov) and will include educational resources as well as information about how to find a job and connect with employment opportunities or how to start or grow a Veteran business using a model created by the Nashville Entrepreneur Center.

NextChapterTN will launch in April 2015.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION PRONG:**

Veterans who would like to pursue a college degree in the State of Tennessee would click on the Education option connect with a checklist that would walk the visitor through the following:

- Determine what school to attend
  - ◇ All Tennessee public, private and not for profit schools will be listed
  - ◇ Each institution's Veteran Representative name and contact information will be provided
  - ◇ A list of each institution's Veteran programs, to include student Veteran organization, will be listed
  - ◇ VETS Campuses will be designated with a gold star and explanation that they met the six criteria have been appropriately designated by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission
- Take admissions test
- Apply for admission
- Official transcripts-online Tennessee database
  - ◇ Translate military service to college credit-The criteria has been established by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission

# Comprehensive Veteran Web Portal (continued)

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- Apply for financial aid
- Search for scholarships
- Current state benefits
  - ◊ Tennessee Veterans Education Support Act-In-State Tuition
  - ◊ Helping Heroes Grant for Veterans-375 first come first serve \$1,000 grant
- Take placement tests
- Attend orientation
- Register for classes
- Apply for benefits
  - ◊ Federal benefits-GI Bill resources
- Connect with Student Veteran Organizations
  - ◊ Message boards to create and continue dialogue among the student Veteran community

## **JOBS FOR VETERANS PRONG:**

The State of Tennessee offers several resources to help Veterans connect with jobs, but these resources are not marketed towards Veterans, therefore, Veterans do not realize the options available to them.

Veterans can register for available job openings through Jobs4TN and employers interested in hiring Veterans can also use this resource to connect with potential applicants. In cases where employers have expressed a desire to hire Veterans, Veteran job-seekers are notified of the opportunities before the general public.

This prong will also include a checklist:

- Register at Jobs4TN
- Nearest Tennessee Department of Labor Career Center
- Resume Builder
- Preparing Veterans for Civilian Jobs
- How to set yourself apart-model pending
- eBenefits-Employment Center
- State benefits-TEAM Act
  - ◊ How to register for open state positions

# Comprehensive Veteran Web Portal (continued)

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- Connect with State Departments actively recruiting Veterans:
  - ◇ Tennessee Department of Correction Veterans
  - ◇ Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security
  - ◇ Tennessee Bureau of Investigations
  - ◇ Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation
  - ◇ Tennessee Department of General Services
  - ◇ Tennessee Department of Human Resources

*Since January 2014, approximately **240** Veterans have been hired due to the above mentioned recruiting efforts. Since the TEAM Act went into effect in October, 2012, **989** Veterans have been hired by the State of Tennessee.*

- Networking opportunities
  - ◇ Job Fairs
  - ◇ Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs Outreach Events/Job Fairs
  - ◇ Paychecks for Patriots-Statewide Hiring Events

## **BUSINESS RESOURCES OR VETERANS PRONG:**

- Veteran Michael Burcham and his team at the Nashville Entrepreneur Center is developing a Boot Camp for Business model to help walk Veterans through the process to start or grow their business.
- The Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs is committed to promote the model and ensure Veterans attend the workshops and participate in the online resources made available by the Nashville Entrepreneur Center.

## **ESTIMATED COSTS:**

- In June, 2014, the Office for Information Resources (OIR) committed to create the Comprehensive Veteran Web Portal at **no charge** as part of their partnership with the Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs.
- NextChapterTN.gov will launch when the new State of Tennessee Content Management System (CMS) is launched in April, 2015.

# Comprehensive Veteran Web Portal (continued)

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## **KEY OUTCOMES:**

- Veteran students, job-seekers and entrepreneurs will have a comprehensive online resource to walk them through each process and connect them with available resources.
- Analytics will be attached to each of the three prongs to monitor needs, identify popular resources and determine additional resources.
- Feedback form will be a feature on each prong and will be used to continue improvement based on recommendations.

# Conclusion

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In conclusion, the strategic plan of the Governor's Veterans Education Task Force is designed to improve access to higher education resources and to make Tennessee the number one state in the country for Veteran educational achievement and employment. Increasing access and support will increase the Tennessee Veteran graduation rate which will enable Veterans to compete for high quality careers. This strategy will also make the Volunteer State more attractive to college-aged Veterans. This comprehensive proactive approach to Veteran higher education is unprecedented. The Task Force carefully crafted the strategic plan to have a large impact and to address needs in the most efficient and resourceful way possible.

The creation of a Veteran Training Academy will improve how educators and administrators recruit, retain and support student Veterans. The accomplishment of a college degree is an individual, campus and state achievement that will have a positive economic impact. Veterans who achieve this milestone increase the likelihood of successfully transitioning from military service to a civilian career. The Veterans Training Academy will also improve the sharing of best practices, inspire innovative programs and improve data collection. Promotion of the Veteran Forward Grant and the Comprehensive Veteran Web Portal will become part of the Veteran Training Academy agenda.

In an effort to continue the synergetic approach, the Veteran Forward Grant will also enhance the exchange of best practices and data collection. Analytics from NextChapterTN.gov will also improve access to higher education, jobs and business resources as well as create another resource for continued data collection.

This strategic approach will also enable the Administration to determine gaps that can be resolved through increased partnerships, transformed processes and policies or legislation.

It is also the recommendation of the Governor's Veterans Education Task Force to continue in a limited capacity to meet on a quarterly basis to continue to collaborate and improve the strategic plan accordingly.

