



Strategies for Transformative Change

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH AND LEADERSHIP

Transformative Change Initiative Overview

The Transformative Change Initiative (TCI) is dedicated to assisting community colleges to scale-up innovations that improve student outcomes and program, organization, and system performance.

Transformative Change Definition

Raising the individual, organizational and system performance of community colleges to unprecedented levels without sacrificing their historic commitment to access and equity.

IMPLEMENTING A MILITARY TRANSITIONS PROGRAM

In 2011, Washburn University of Topeka, Kansas was awarded a \$19.6 million Round 1 TAACCCT grant through the Department of Labor to provide industry-relevant, hands-on training for high-demand, high-wage careers. The consortium, Technical Retraining to Achieve Credentials (TRAC-7), was led by Washburn University, and included seven Kansas community and technical colleges: Washburn Institute of Technology, Cloud County Community College, Dodge City Community College, Salina Area Technical College, Garden City Community College, Flint Hills Technical College, and Highland Community College.

In 2014, Washburn University received a \$11.9 million Round 4 TAACCCT grant known as Kansas Technical Retraining Among Industry-targeted Networks (KanTRAIN). KanTRAIN works with employers, industry, workforce, and higher education partners in Advanced Manufacturing and Health Care to provide access to employment sector opportunities for their participants. KanTRAIN is comprised of Washburn University and four Kansas community and technical colleges: Washburn Institute of Technology, Flint Hills Technical College, Garden City Community College, and Wichita Area Technical College.

Implementation of a Military Transitions Program

TRAC-7 created a Military Transitions Program to support unemployed, underemployed, and transitioning Kansas veterans and service members (SM). Central to this work was the active development of collaborative partnerships with military offices, workforce centers, and other government and non-profit organizations who work with veterans and SMs. TRAC-7 designed and implemented the program in five stages:

1. Consortium Program Awareness and Relationship Building
2. Military Outreach Efforts
3. Continuous Research, Improvement, and Training
4. Collaboration with Industry, Businesses, Educational Institutions, and Employment Agencies
5. Job Placement Assistance

These processes were facilitated by a Military Transitions Director hired by TRAC-7 and are being continued through KanTRAIN. KanTRAIN is building on the existing relationships and programs created through TRAC-7 to expand the opportunities and supports for veterans and SMs.

Key Factors that Facilitated the Implementation of the Military Transitions Program

- **Growing Need to Serve Veteran Populations.** Nationally, there was a total of 2.2 million new veterans between 2004 and 2012 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). Unemployment rates and length of unemployment for veterans were rising, with 53% of veterans in 2010-2011 facing an average period of 18 weeks of unemployment within 15 months of leaving active service (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). Between 2009 and 2012, 125,589 veterans used GI Bill educational benefits, 35% of whom pursued associate degree programs (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). With over 200,000 veterans living in Kansas, representing almost 7% of the population in the state, TRAC-7 recognized the importance of supporting veterans and SMs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).
- **Challenges Faced by Veterans Transitioning to College.** Veterans and SMs transitioning into college face challenges on two fronts. The first challenge is in navigating the college systems, including accessing veteran's benefits and services such as the GI Bill and accommodations under the Disability Act, along with receiving college credit for their military service training and education. The second challenge area is integration into the college culture, a contrast from the close community and bonds developed during service. In some cases classmates' questions, opinions, and reactions as they relate to the veterans' or SMs' military service can create an uncomfortable environment.
- **Engaging Military Expertise.** Hiring a veteran with active duty and National Guard experience to serve as Military Transitions Director was an advantage. TRAC-7 hired a retired veteran who had served 23 years in the Active Duty Air Force and the Kansas Air National Guard. His military training, education, and contacts proved invaluable to implementing the TRAC-7 Military Transitions Program. He applied his knowledge of military structures, culture, and customs to build trust and credibility with key stakeholders.



TRAC-7 Veteran Outcomes. Eighty-five veterans and SMs enrolled in TRAC-7 programs in the three years of program implementation. Seventy-three of the 85 enrollees (86%) obtained a credential (a total of 86 certificates and 12 associated degrees). Of the 32 enrollees unemployed at the time of enrollment, eleven have been confirmed as employed, two pursued further educational opportunities after completing programs, and one had not exited programs at the time of this reporting. Additional follow up is being conducted to identify the employment statuses of the remaining 18 unemployed veterans and SMs.

KEY FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVELY SERVING VETERAN POPULATIONS

Knowing why men and women serve is critical to building educational programs and services that are responsive to their needs. Some serve to answer a personal calling, some enlist for the education benefits, including the GI Bill. Service members may put life plans on hold - unable to commit to going back to school, changing jobs, or starting a family - while they prepare for combat deployments.

Many veterans and SMs make the transition from military to civilian life without the need of support services. However, many other veterans and SMs need support services to transition into college. Examples of such services include mental health counseling and treatment (including suicide prevention), healthcare and physical rehabilitation, alcohol and substance abuse counseling, housing assistance, and employment assistance.

ROLE OF THE MILITARY TRANSITIONS DIRECTOR

The TRAC-7 Military Transitions Director's primary goal was to assist unemployed, underemployed, and transitioning veterans and SMs in meeting their education or career training needs. A focus of the Director was on veterans and SMs assigned to the National Guard or Reserve who were unable to obtain full-time employment in the civilian sector. The Director helped veterans and SMs acquire the skills, degrees, and credentials needed for high-wage and high-skill employment by facilitating access to consortium programs and services. The Director assisted veterans and SMs in determining which consortium program was a good fit. The ultimate goal was to increase the number of veterans and SMs who attained certificates, degrees and industry-recognized credentials.

REFERENCES

Department of Veterans Affairs. (2015). *2015 veteran economic opportunity report*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/docs/VeteranEconomicOpportunityReport2015.PDF>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2015). *2010-2014 American community survey 5-year estimates*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://factfinder.census.gov>

"I was in the United States Marine Corps. I got laid off from my previous job.... So I went down to the Workforce Center and talked with my Veterans Representative. I decided to take the Advanced Systems Technology course....If it wasn't for the training, I would not have the experience or the knowledge to even apply for a job like this." Troy, TRAC-7 participant



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Building partnerships among government agencies, nonprofits, and organizations serving the military and veterans was central to TRAC-7's Military Transitions Program. The Military Transition Director recognized the importance of obtaining top military leadership support before attempting to directly communicate about services to veterans and SMs. By obtaining approval from the top down, most military offices were willing to share information about the program with the veterans and SMs that they serve. Building and maintaining military leadership trust was critical to approaching veterans and SMs with support programs and services.

The TRAC-7 Military Transitions Program identified and collaborated with over 300 military and military serving offices and agencies through the state of Kansas in their efforts to develop and disseminate information about the Military Transitions Program. A subset of these stakeholders met with Washburn University regularly to discuss issues that affect the military population and made recommendations on outreach opportunities. Key stakeholder groups include:

- Active Duty Air Force and Army, and spouses;
- Civilian organizations that support the military;
- Industry partners;
- Joining Community Forces;
- Kansas Adjutant General's Office (Kansas National Guard);
- Kansas National Guard;
- Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR);
- Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs Office (KCVAO);
- Kansas Department of Commerce (KDOC);
- Kansas Workforce Centers; and
- Reserve Units (Army, Air, Navy, Marines).

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