

Chapter 1 – Introduction to Transition Assistance

Returning to civilian life is an exciting time, one full of hope for what the next chapter might bring. But the transition is also a complex undertaking. You have many steps to take, and many questions to get answered. Transition assistance staff, personnel office staff, relocation specialists, education counselors, and many others can help, but only you and your family can make the critical decisions that must be made. So where should you start?

This Pre-Separation Guide will help you work through the sections listed on DD Form 2648, “Pre-Separation Counseling Checklist.” The checklist allows you to indicate the benefits and services that you wish to receive additional counseling as you prepare your ITP. In those cases where the Transition Counselor cannot answer questions, you will be referred to subject matter experts that will provide you the information that you need. Work through each element of the guide, but take advantage of your opportunity to request the specific resources that are appropriate for you.

If you are uncertain about your future plans, now is the time to obtain all the assistance and information you need. Professional guidance and counseling are available at your Transition Assistance Office, as are workshops, publications, information resources, automated resources, and government programs. Take advantage of each one that pertains to your unique situation. It is your Individual Transition Plan: It is your responsibility and your life.

Independent research has found that on average, Service members participating in the Transition Assistance Program find their first post-military job three weeks sooner than those who do not participate in TAP.

A. Pre-Separation Counseling: Your Best Beginning

Your first step in the separation process is to go to your installation's Transition Assistance Office. Each service has its own way of doing things; so too with the Transition Assistance Offices. In most cases, you will find the Transition Assistance Office located inside your installation's Family Center.

Listed below is the name of each service's Transition Assistance Program:

- **Army:** Army Career and Alumni Program - The Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) is a military personnel function and the Centers are found under the Director of Human Resources (DHR) or the Military Personnel Office (MILPO). <http://www.acap.army.mil/>
- **Air Force:** Airman and Family Readiness Center. You can find the nearest office using the military installation finder at: <http://www.militaryinstallations.dod.mil>
- **Navy:** Fleet and Family Support Center. Navy personnel should make an appointment with their Command Career Counselor for a Pre-Separation counseling interview at least 180 days prior to separation. <http://www.fssp.org>
- **Marines:** Career Resource Management Center (CRMC)/Transition & Employment Assistance Program Center. <http://www.usmc-mccs.org/tamp/index.cfm>
- **Coast Guard:** Worklife Division – Transition Assistance. Coast Guard Worklife staffs can be found at your nearest Integrated Support Command. http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-w/g-wk/wkw/work-life_programs/transition_assistance.htm

Some Terminology and Notes on Your New Status

Discharge: Complete severance from all military status gained by the enlistment or induction concerned.

Separation: A general term that includes discharge, release from active duty, release from custody and control of the Armed Forces, transfer to the Individual Ready Reserve, and similar changes in active or reserve status.

Transition Benefits: Benefits provided to assist Service members during the transition process. Eligibility for certain types of transition benefits will depend on the nature and characterization your discharge.

Transition Services: All separating members are eligible for services one year prior to separation. Retiring Service members are eligible for transition services two years prior to and one year after retirement. Eligibility for services is not affected by length or character or service.

Step 1. Schedule Your Pre-Separation Counseling Appointment

You may schedule your Pre-Separation counseling appointment at your installation Transition Assistance Office any time within a year before your planned separation date. However, since it takes time to prepare for an effective transition, be sure to contact your Transition Assistance Office at least 180 days before your separation. By law Pre-Separation counseling (completion of DD Form 2648, "Pre-Separation Counseling Checklist") must occur no later than 90 days prior to separation; therefore, **if you have not had an appointment 90 days before separation, call the Transition Assistance Office or your Navy Command Career Counselor and schedule a visit immediately.** However, it is strongly recommended that you set up your Pre-Separation counseling appointment at least 180 days prior to separation.

Step 2. Review the Pre-Separation Counseling Checklist

Your Transition Counselor or Command Career Counselor will walk you through the Pre-Separation Counseling Checklist, which helps ensure that you will receive the necessary assistance and advice to benefit fully from the wide range of services and entitlements available to you. The checklist is required by law to be filed in the official military personnel record of each Service member receiving the counseling.

At this meeting, the Transition Assistance Office or Command Career Counselor will:

- **Assist** you in developing an individual needs assessment.
- **Identify** helpful relocation resources.
- **Offer** immediate and long-range career guidance.
- **Provide** benefits counseling.
- **Refer** you to other service providers for any additional assistance you may require.

Step 3. Draft Your Individual Transition Plan

Information on drafting your Individual Transition Plan (ITP) is available through the Transition Assistance Office. You may choose to use your Pre-Separation Counseling Checklist as a guide for developing your own unique ITP. Once you have created your ITP, show it to your Transition Counselor or Command Career Counselor. They will provide you further assistance or refer you to a subject matter expert to assist you. Full participation in this process by you and your spouse is encouraged.

B. Phases of Individual Transition Planning

All military personnel transitioning out of the service go through the same fundamental stages. These stages can be divided into the following seven different phases: Self-Assessment, Exploration, Skills Development, Intern Programs, Job Search, Job Selection, and Support.

Phase One: Self-Assessment

Ask yourself: Who am I? What are my talents and experiences? Why would someone want to hire me?

In this phase, document your portfolio of knowledge, experience, skills, talents, and abilities. For starters, create a list using your personal DD Form 2586, "Verification of Military Experience and Training." Your VMET outlines the training and experience you received during your military career. It is designed to help you, but it is not a resume.

To get your verification document, go to the VMET website at <http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/vmet>. All separating military personnel can electronically download and print their VMET document and personal cover letter from your military service from the VMET website. Simply click the "Request Document" and "Request Cover Letter," tabs and print each of these documents after their downloaded.

You can get your verification document online as long as you have a current DoD Common Access Card (CAC) or have a current Defense Finance, Accounting Service (DFAS) myPay Personal Identification Number (PIN). However, you should retrieve it within 120 days prior to your separation. If you have problems getting your VMET and need assistance, check with your local Transition Counselor.

Add anything else you can think of to this list. In essence, you are now creating an "asset bank" from which you can draw later when called upon to write a resume or attend a job interview. If you need help, use the professional guidance available through your local installation Transition Assistance Office or Education Center. Or refer to the self-help section of your local library or bookstore for useful career planning books.

In addition you can get an official transcript of your education and training credits from your service branch. Each branch has their own system for recording your military (and civilian) education and experience. The following explains how to:

Army

- The **Army's AARTS** (Army/American Council on Education Registry Transcript System) automatically captures your military training, your Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) and college level examinations scores with the college credit recommended. AARTS Home Page: <http://aarts.army.mil/>

Navy and Marines

- The **Navy and Marine Corps use the SMART system**. This system automatically captures your training, experience and standardized test scores. SMART Homepage: <https://www.navycollege.navy.mil/transcript.html>

Air Force

- The **Community College of the Air Force (CCAF)** automatically captures your training, experience and standardized test scores. Transcript information may be viewed at the CCAF website: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/ccaf/>

Coast Guard

- The **Coast Guard Institute (CGI)** requires each Service member to submit documentation of all training (except correspondence course records), along with an enrollment form, to receive a transcript. Transcript information can be found at the Coast Guard Institute Home Page: <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cgi/index.html>

Veterans

- Under most circumstances, Veterans are eligible to use their former service branches transcript program. However if you are not eligible for AARTS, SMART, CCAF, or CGI systems, you will need to fill out DD Form 295, "Application for the Evaluation of Learning Experiences During Military Service." and provide your DD Form 214, "Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty," to receive credit or your experience.

The investment you make now in conducting your assessment is crucial. It will bring the "professional you" into clearer focus, and it will have a major impact on your career decisions.

The key to a smooth transition is to be prepared well before you separate from the military. Start early. Make connections and build networks that will help you transition into the civilian world.

Phase Two: Exploration

Ask Yourself: What are the current and emerging occupational areas that are attractive to me? Do these jobs coincide with my values and aptitudes? How do I find these jobs?

With your assessment in hand, you probably have some ideas about what you want to do. Now is not the time to limit your opportunities. Expand the list of job titles and career paths that appeal to you. Broaden your geographic horizons to include several places where you might like to pursue your career. Many resources are available to help you explore your expanded set of options.

The Transition Assistance Office can help you focus on jobs that employers need to fill today and will need to fill in the near future. Transition staff can help you identify the geographic areas that have opportunities in your fields of interest.

Your state employment office is another good resource during this phase, offering such services as job interviewing; selection and referral to openings; job development; employment counseling; career evaluation; referral to training or other support services; and testing. Your state office can also lead you to information on related jobs nearby and introduce you to the Department of Labor database, DoD Job Search, which has listings of thousands of jobs across the nation.

And don't forget your local library's reference section. Most of them are full of helpful publications relating to job searches.

Phase Three: Skills Development

Ask Yourself: How do I prepare myself to be an attractive candidate in the occupational areas that I have chosen? Do I need additional education or training?

As you continue through the exploration phase, you may find some interesting opportunities for which you feel only partially qualified. Your local Transition Assistance Office and Education Center can help you determine the academic credentials or vocational training programs you will need and how to get them.

Phase Four: Intern Programs

Ask Yourself: Do I have the aptitude and experience needed to pursue my occupational interests? Are there internships, volunteer jobs, temporary services, or part-time jobs where I might try out the work that interests me?

To learn about intern programs, inquire at your Transition Assistance Office, your local civilian personnel office, or the state employment office. Some government-sponsored programs, such as obtaining teaching credentials, can provide income and training in exchange for guaranteed employment. Check local and base libraries and the education office for books containing intern program information. Temporary agencies are also a great way to become familiar with a company or industry. Explore internship possibilities with private employers: Many companies have such programs but do not advertise them. Don't necessarily turn down an interesting volunteer position. Volunteering increases your professional skills and can sometimes turn into a paid position.

Phase Five: The Job Search

Ask Yourself: How do I identify job requirements and prospective companies, find networks and placement agencies, and generally increase my knowledge and experience in the job market? How do I write a resume, develop leads, conduct an interview, and complete a job application?

Once you have selected your future career, you must now begin the challenge of finding work. Millions of people are hired all across the country every year. Employee turnover opens up existing positions, and entirely new jobs are created every day. Nevertheless, the job market is competitive. The best way to improve your odds is to play your best hand: Seek the opportunities for which you are best prepared.

Work hard at finding a job. Network! The vast majority of jobs are filled by referrals, not the want ads. Use your network of friends, colleagues, and family; as well as the job listings provided by your installation's Transition Assistance Office, the local personnel office, or even the nearest community college. Take advantage of job-hunting seminars, resume-writing workshops, and interviewing techniques classes too. Attend job fairs and talk to as many company representatives as possible.

Phase Six: Job Selection

Ask Yourself: How do I select the right job?

Although it might be tempting, you don't have to take the first job that comes along. Consider the type of work, location, salary and benefits, climate, and how the opportunity will enhance your future career growth. Even if you take the first job offer, you are not necessarily locked into it. Some experts say employers are biased against hiring the unemployed. A shrewd move might be to look for a job from a job. Take a suitable position-and then quickly move on to a better one.

Phase Seven: Support

Ask Yourself: How do I make a smooth transition to a new career?

For your transition to be truly successful, you should manage the personal affairs side of your career change with the same professionalism and care as your job search. Things like out-processing, relocation, financial management, taking care of your family, and coping with the inevitable stress are important too.

Your Transition Assistance Office can offer support as you go through this process. In addition your ITP provides an opportunity to integrate these issues with the career-oriented activities that are the central focus of your transition effort.

Note: You are eligible for continued transition assistance for up to 180 days after separation.

A Journey

*Think of your transition as a journey. The Individual Transition Plan is your map. Use it to chart your course and set your destination. You choose the best route; select the landmarks that will be important to you. This document, the Pre-Separation Guide, serves as your guidebook, offering insight and information as you travel along your route. Use the Transition Assistance Office as a trusty compass to guide you in the right direction. Throughout your journey, **you** remain in charge of where you are going and how you will get there.*