

PROJECT REPORT



**U.S. Government
Customer Experience
CAP Goal**

**Pilot:
Cross-Government
Journey Map**

**Service Member
Transition to Civilian
Employment**

OMB and the Department of Veterans Affairs co-lead the “Improving Customer Experience with Federal Services” CAP Goal. The two agencies coordinated the research and analysis in concert with the Lab at OPM and GSA. The Veterans Experience Office (VEO) works across the VA’s administrations to improve experiences and benefits that have an outsized impact on a veteran’s wellbeing.

Each year about 300,000 service members leave military service and return to civilian life. Many of those service members struggle to find jobs in the labor market that provide financial security.

We created a map that documents the experiences of 25 service members to find work — it shows when, where, and how federal agencies step in to offer key support.

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CREATING A CITIZEN JOURNEY MAP: A CROSS-AGENCY COLLABORATION

Hi there. We're a team of five designers who work inside the federal government. We work on different projects to make government services more responsive to citizens using many methods, including Human-Centered Design.

In winter 2018, we completed an exciting project collaborating with six federal agencies to develop a citizen journey map. The map illustrates the journey of enlisted service members who leave the military and work to find a decent sustaining job back in the labor market. It also highlights some of the key resources that six federal agencies offer service members during their career transition journey. We completed the research in eight weeks, designed the map in four, and engaged several federal agencies all along the way.

This project taught us a lot about how to:

- Invite federal agencies into a collaborative design project and keep them engaged at key moments;
- Create a citizen journey map that is informed by the efforts of many agencies yet not beholden to any particular one; and
- Keep a citizen journey map project on track while working under a tight deadline.

We're sharing our story in the hopes that other groups that do collaborative work across agencies can learn from it. In this mini-guidebook, we provide a frank accounting of how, when, and why this project got started; and how we found our design "North Star" during this project, lost it, and found it again. We also share some insights we've learned about entering into a collaborative relationship with several federal agencies who all work in the same problem-solving space.

— Matt, Sara, Aaron, Elaine, and Sarah

HOW OUR PROJECT CAME ABOUT

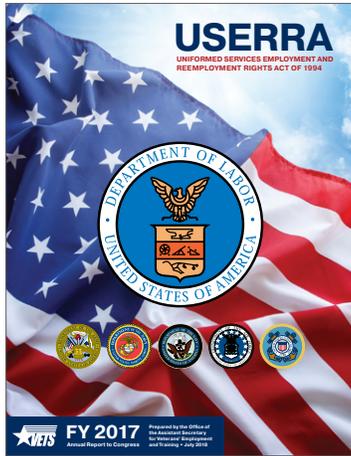
In 2018, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) announced a continuation and expansion of the previous Administration's Customer Service Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) goals. The new goal outlined that agencies should focus more on how citizens use and experience government services. Agencies would need to provide a streamlined and responsive customer experience across government. OMB also wanted a closer look, and understanding of, what happens when a select group of citizens all rely on several federal agencies at once to achieve a certain goal—such as finding a job or planning one's retirement.

That's when Matt, our team lead from General Services Administration's (GSA) Customer Experience Office, in partnership with the CX CAP Goal leadership team, began plans for crafting a cross-agency journey map. OMB decided the map would focus on the experience of service members leaving the military and transitioning to work in the labor market. Many service members receive federal funding and support from multiple agencies during their transition into the labor market—and yet many still struggle to find a decent, family-sustaining job. According to the Economic Policy Institute one in five working veterans (about 1.8 million veterans) are paid less than \$15 dollars an hour. This project would involve documenting the experience of service members during this career transition and interviewing key federal agency staff to understand when, where, and how federal resources support service members. Although the focus of the project was gaining a deeper understanding of this population, it would also be an experiment in cross-agency collaboration through research, synthesis, and strategic direction.

It was around that time that Matt invited the rest of us (Aaron, Sara, Sarah, and Elaine)—who'd all done previous design work with veterans—aboard. Except for Matt, we're all based at the Lab at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Collectively, the five of us had what was needed to get this design sprint off the ground:

- Previous work with OMB staff who could lend credibility and authority to this effort;
- Previous design work with veterans and with veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DOD) (two key agencies among the half dozen we were soon to interview);
- Expertise in qualitative research and design;
- Experience diplomatically navigating high-stakes conversations with key staff from multiple federal agencies.

GETTING THE PROJECT OFF THE GROUND



Figures 1, 2 & 3 — Select examples from our literature review; Includes Department of Labor, Department of Veteran Affairs, and Center for American Progress.

Three federal agencies play a critical role in the life of service members when they leave military service and transition back to the labor market: DOD, VA, and Department of Labor (DOL). We needed to talk with these three agencies as well as several other key agencies (Office of Personnel Management [OPM], Small Business Administration [SBA], and Department of Education [ED]) to learn more about their impact on service members during this chapter in their lives.

LEVERAGE YOUR NETWORK

Initially we tried introducing the project to different key players by ourselves. We didn't get anywhere and we lost precious time. The second time around, we gained traction by asking people who are well known within federal agencies if they could help us connect with experts across the government. OMB introduced us to DOL, VEO introduced us to the key players within VA, and OPM introduced us to a formal working group comprised of those key federal agencies that support service members during their transition to civilian life.

PARALLEL WORK CONTEXT BUILDING

While we worked to get these formalities ironed out, we also dove into secondary research. We reviewed key reports (Figures 1, 2, & 3) on transition on each federal agency website; pored over white papers and transcripts from Congressional hearings on the topic; and interviewed ten informal experts on the topic. Those informal experts included community groups that serve as matchmakers between veterans and the local job market and they shared the challenges and opportunities many veterans encounter in the local job market. This foundation helped us shape the topics in our future interviews with federal agency staff and veterans.

BUILD A RESEARCH PLAN

Next, we drafted a research plan and distilled it to one page. The plan offered a clear guide to the work ahead, so that we knew what needed to be accomplished and by when. The plan also made our research process transparent, and we would use it to introduce our project at the interagency working group.

In the plan, we shared our approach to gathering qualitative research. We defined the subgroup of service members we would interview in order to capture transition stories that would ring true for the broadest

number of people, rather than the unique few. We would talk to representatives from key federal agencies as well as informal experts. We would then bring together our interviews with our secondary research findings and thoroughly sift through them for key insights.

From those insights, we would build a journey map. The map would be a catalyst for conversations and collaborations across government. The map would also honor the work already underway by federal agencies to support service members during their career transition. And we would do it all in eight weeks because we were tasked with that deadline.

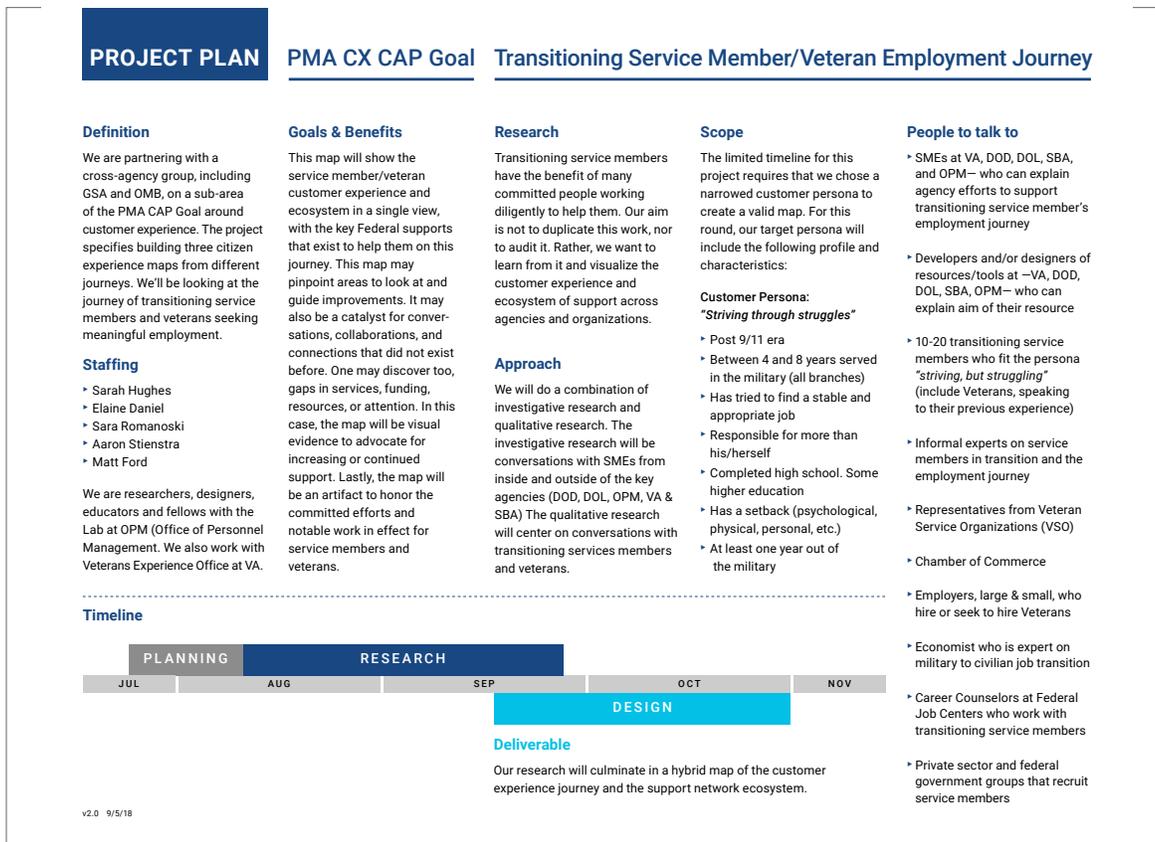


Figure 4 — Our second version of the project plan. We first shared it with VEO leadership.

INTRODUCING THE PROJECT AND ENGAGING SKEPTICS

With the project brief in hand, we went on a road show, introducing the journey map project to DOD, DOL, VA, OPM, SBA, and ED. We brought with us to these meetings print copies of citizen journey maps that our colleagues created in the past (*Figure 5 & 6, page 9*), so that people who had never seen a journey map before had something concrete and tangible to look at, and respond to. The artifacts exemplified what we planned to produce and gave reason for the research.

We found these meetings invaluable. They gave us an opportunity to explain the project's goal and intent—that is, to help federal agencies see the transition journey through service members' eyes and look for ways to better support service members in their journey. During these meetings, we could also engage skeptics of our work, thereby clearing away any misconceptions about the project early on.

We heard a number of concerns from agency representatives. Some asked us if our project was really about documenting shortcomings in agency programs so as to justify later budget cuts. We reassured them this was not our goal, nor was it what OMB tasked us to do. Others worried that our project was duplicating other efforts within government focused on service members and their transition back home. We explained that we intentionally designed our project to build off of—and *complement*—other transition initiatives. Still other agency representatives voiced concerns about the time that our interviews would take away from their staff. We assured that the interviews would last an hour and a half at most.

These open and frank conversations with stakeholders built a level of trust and rapport between our team and the agencies we would be counting on for insights and information. These conversations helped pave the way for our one-on-one qualitative interviews with each agency that were soon to follow.

Open and frank conversations with stakeholders built a level of trust and rapport between our team and the agencies.

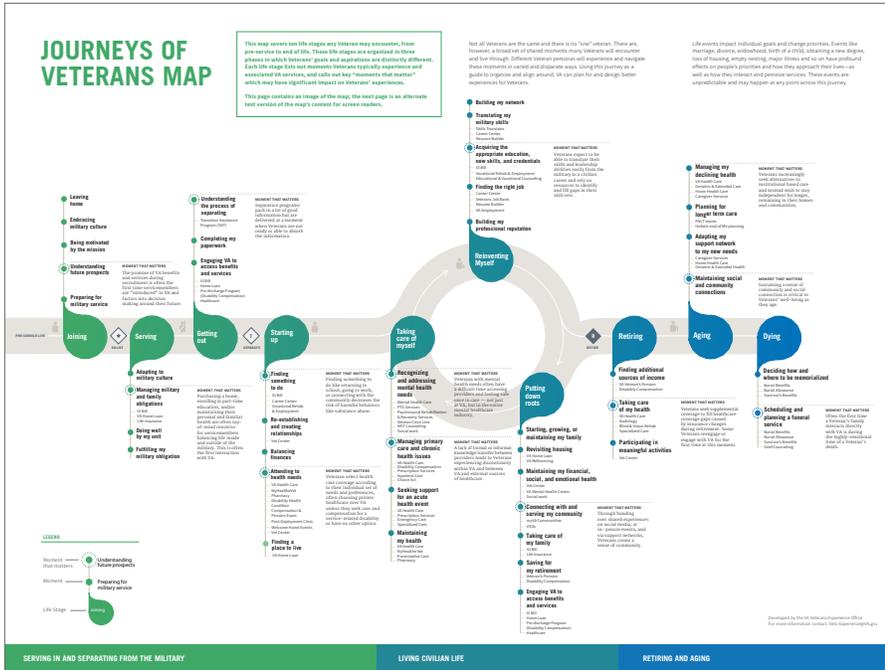


Figure 5 — Journey of Veterans Map, produced by the Veterans Experience Office.

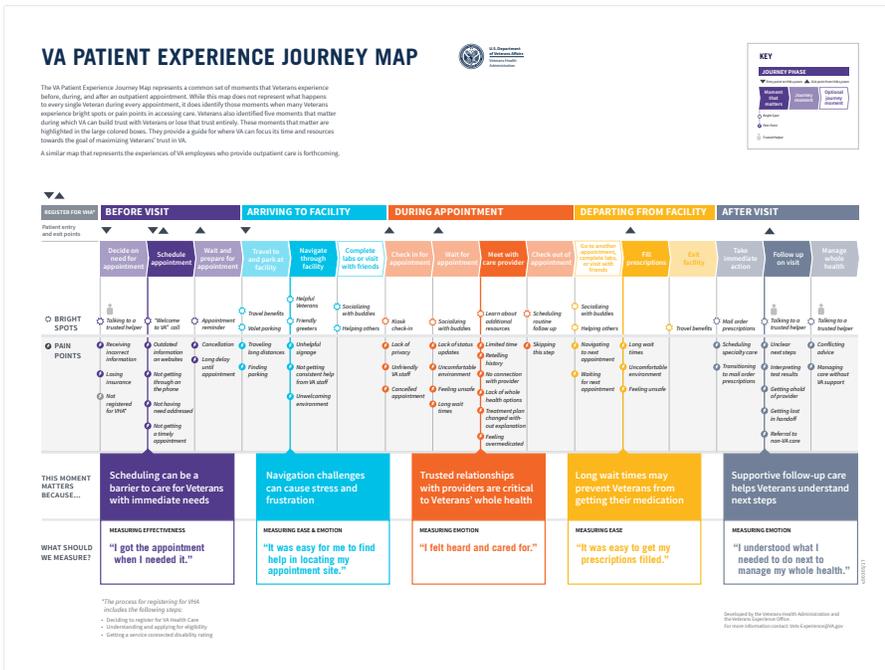


Figure 6 — VA Patient Experience Journey Map, produced by the Veterans Experience Office.

OUR NORTH STAR: UNDERSTANDING VETERANS' TRANSITION EXPERIENCE

A key piece of our research was talking with service members to find out whether they were landing well—or not—in the labor market after leaving military service. We also wanted to find out:

- What was helping service members towards a smooth career transition;
- What was getting in the way of a smooth transition;
- Where, how, and when supports from the federal government played a role.

Roughly 300,000 service members separate from the military each year. For this 8-week research sprint, we planned to interview between 10-15 people (in the end, we interviewed 25). First we sought out service members who shared a demographic profile similar to the majority of those currently separating from military service. They had to have enlisted after 9-11, served ten years or fewer, and separated with a rank of E-6 or lower (or the equivalent of such). We also sought out service members who were supporting a household since people in the military tend to marry and have children earlier in their lives than civilians. This profile represented those with greatest needs. Working to make their separation easier would benefit all veterans.

We wanted to speak with people whose life stories reflect the diversity of those who serve. We engaged grass-roots organizations at the local level to recruit for us. In all, we interviewed 25 men and women from different ethnic backgrounds and walks of life who served in all branches of service. We interviewed people now living in different parts of the country and in different types of communities (rural areas, small towns, and big cities).

Of our 25 interviewees, we intentionally interviewed a few individuals who did not fit the most common profile of those leaving military service. We interviewed a few high-ranking, retired officers and found that their transition experiences were markedly different. The sharp contrast between officers and enlisted helped us better see the sharp lines around both groups' transition experience. The contrast also proved a fertile area to mine for insights that furthered our research.

In our interviews, we asked service members about:

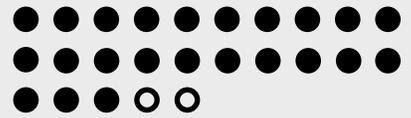
- Their life circumstances before joining the military;
- The work they did while in service;
- What type of work they wanted for themselves once they got out of the military;
- What career preparation they'd received;
- What happened once they left the military and searched for work;
- Where, when, and how they came across—or sought out—help from federal agencies during the full journey their career transition;
- What helped them land a sustaining job—and what got in the way of landing a sustaining job.

The transition stories that we heard from veterans became the North Star of our research effort.

When, at different points along the way, our small team felt flooded by the sheer magnitude of information about veterans, we returned to these interviews to ground ourselves in what we were hearing—most powerfully and most frequently—from veterans themselves.

Our research demographics

We interviewed 25 people



● 23 veterans

○ 02 Active service members

Branches

Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard

Rank

21 Enlisted and 4 Officers
Enlisted rank: E4-E8

Time served

Average years of service: 10

Age

Age range at separation: 22-47
Average age of interviewees: 32

Separation

19 voluntary and 6 non-voluntary

Gender

Male: 14, female: 11

Race and ethnicity

Mixed

INVITING STAKEHOLDERS INTO OUR SYNTHESIS

Once we wrapped up all of our interviews, we set aside an afternoon to share our research findings with DOD, VA, DOL, SBA, OPM, and ED. Our collaboration process followed this structure:

FOUR-HOUR SYNTHESIS

The day started with a four-hour synthesis just among our team. We set up our synthesis workshop in a large office with plenty of open wall space. We covered one wall with the reports and key sources from our secondary research effort (*Figure 7*).

We covered another wall with “persona sheets” from our interviews with agencies and transitioned service members (*Figure 8*). Our persona sheets included the key quotes, attributes, motivations, challenges, and insights from each person interviewed.

These persona sheets were the primary format we used for moving from the raw data to insights. We dedicated time to review all of our persona sheets, and then we teased out the themes that we saw emerging most powerfully and most frequently across our interviews. Along the way, we’d crosswalk those themes with the sources (white papers and government documents) from our secondary research effort.



Figure 7 — Wall of secondary research



Figure 8 — Wall of persona sheets

DOCUMENTING CENTRAL THEMES

We then created a board (Figures 9 & 10) that captures the central themes that emerged from synthesis, organizing them by what we heard from service members (on one side of the board) and what we heard from government agencies and informal experts (on the other).

FEEDBACK FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Then, in the afternoon, we invited our government stakeholders (OMB, our project sponsor, and staff with the six federal agencies whom we interviewed) to review our findings and reflect on them. We walked the agencies through each key phase of our synthesis process. At the end of each key phase, we invited their feedback and reflections, so that they had a frame and context to respond to. We also shared some ideas with them about what type of feedback would help guide our efforts.

With representatives from six agencies participating, we also had to manage the tendency for some agency representatives to promote their agency's role in helping transitioned service members find good jobs. We emphasized to the group that our findings are drawn from cross walking our interviews with agencies, service members, and informal experts (or those who work closely with veterans to match them with jobs in their communities).



Figure 9 — Board of synthesized themes

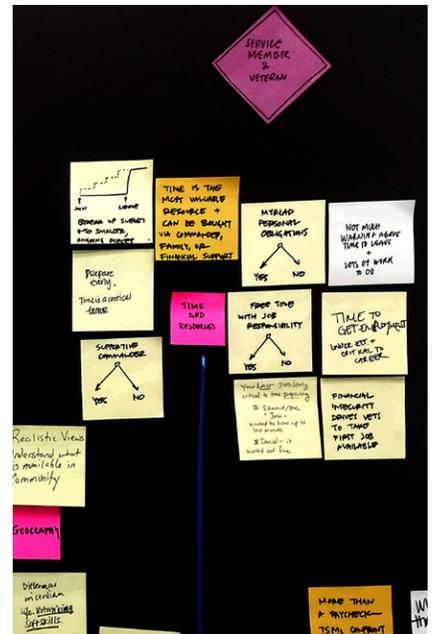


Figure 10 — Closer view of Figure 9

MAKING THE MAP AND FINDING OUR POINT OF VIEW

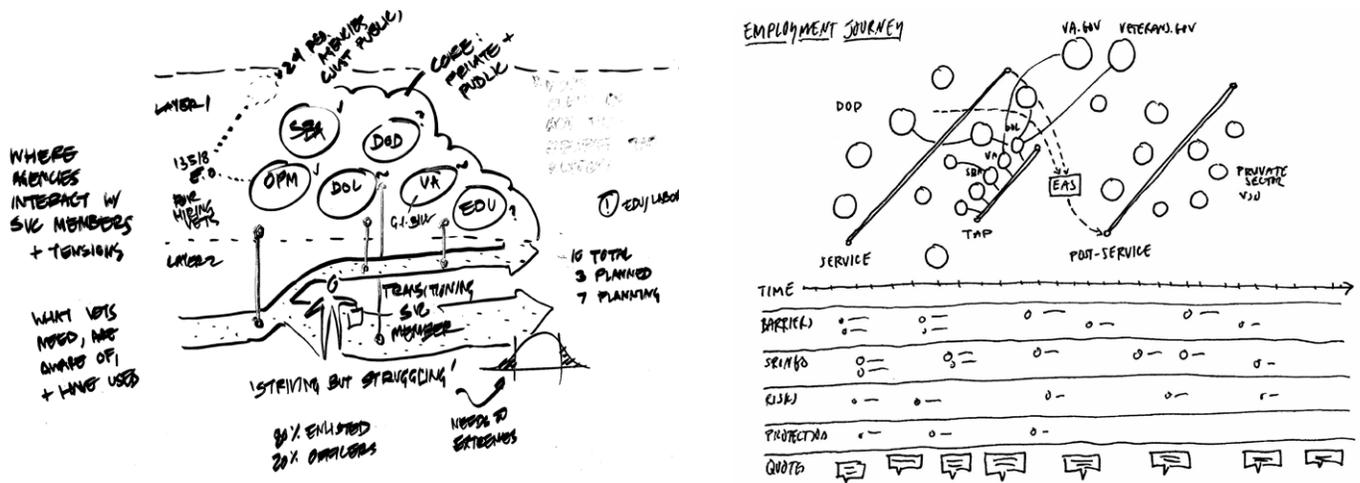


Figure 11 — Early exploratory sketches

We didn't wait until synthesis wrapped up to start working on our customer journey map. Instead, we created several sketches (Figure 11) while we were in the middle of our research sprint. We were curious to see how the sketches could help our research inquiry. Were we asking the right questions? Were we talking to the right people? Were we learning enough about the ecosystem? The sketches prompted us to think about these questions and generate ideas for how to answer them.

We shared our concept sketches during the synthesis session with our agency stakeholders. Response was quiet. But sharing our early-stage concepts with stakeholders was important—the sketches showed that our process was thoughtful and selective, and that everyone had an equal role in sharing the direction.

After synthesis, we had a lot of information to process and assemble before we could design the map. The big tasks were:

- Distilling the experiences of the service members we interviewed into a single story that would reflect what we heard from them most powerfully and most frequently;
- Building the agency view of the system;
- Looking across the data for themes.

But even after we drafted these component parts, we were still stumped. We needed a strong point of view to anchor our decision making about the over-arching story of the map and to give the map a narrative voice.

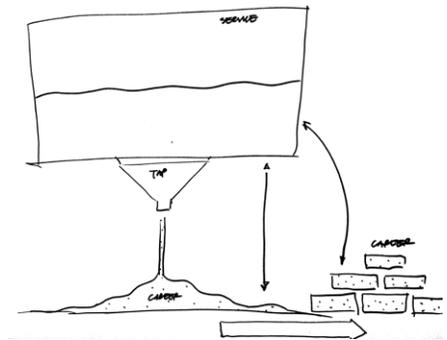
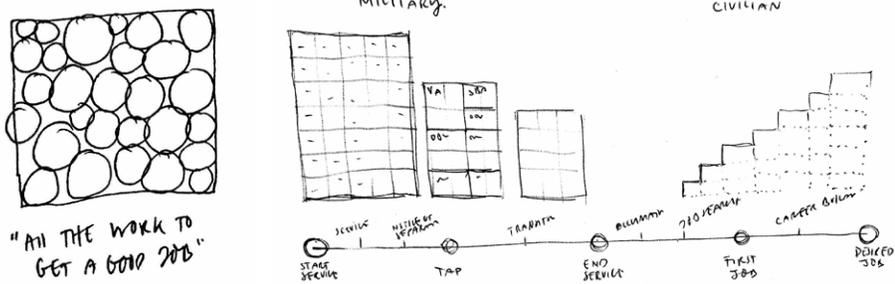


Figure 12 — Our sketches exploring the building blocks concept

We sat down and thought about the timing of things. We thought about when and how federal agencies direct most of their support to transitioning service members. Service members receive the majority of information about government resources all at one moment—during a week-long workshop, Transition Assistance Program, informally called TAP. Many service members attend TAP within months of leaving the military. It’s a time when they feel most overwhelmed by the transition ahead and least able to take in a firehose of information. Still, it’s up to service members to sift through the numerous resources, make sense of what would be useful given their circumstance, and create a plan of action accordingly.

This is where we had a breakthrough conversation and drew sketches (Figure 12) that gave us our point of view.

What if, instead, federal agencies provided resources and guidance about career transition all throughout a service member’s time of service? This would be equivalent to giving them building blocks that they could store up, and use to build their pathway to a smooth transition down the road, and into the future.

We expanded upon this metaphor. We also realized that in our interviews, we were hearing about building blocks that service members were using to pave a road to smooth transition. Building blocks such as “knowing what kind of work they want to do when they leave the military” and “knowing how to translate their work and accomplishments in the military to civilians”. We also heard about stumbling blocks—that is, things that got in the way of service members’ efforts to find a decent job in the labor market.

We created the customer journey map around this concept of building blocks. We situated the building blocks, in blue, above the journey line, vertically centered in the layout. We arranged these blocks on a stair step incline to enhance the upward mobility concept. We placed the stumbling blocks below the journey line in red. The federal agency supports and programs were at the top of the map. The themes, data, and research details were at the bottom.

Resources are building blocks that service members can store up and use to build their pathway to a smooth transition down the road.

MAKING THE MAP AND FINDING OUR POINT OF VIEW (CONT.)

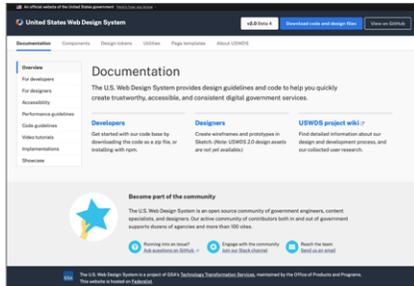


Figure 13 — U.S. Web Design Standards

Starting with this first draft, we assembled a lean but functional visual design system. We wanted our map to be accessible and so we kept the design as clean and sharp as possible. The map would be dense with content so we designed it to be printed large but available as a vector-based PDF, which would not degrade as one zooms in. The PDF would be 508 compliant. We took cue from the U.S. Digital Services web design standards (Figure 13) in using a plain and simple style that would speak across government agencies in a familiar visual language. We excluded agency seals or other logos to avoid visual clutter. Even though the styling would be minimal, we aimed for elegance with ample whitespace, simple shapes, and a single typeface.

Finally, we had our first draft (Figure 14). We shared it with stakeholders and they responded favorably and they provided helpful feedback to make it better.

We concluded that the map lacked a focal point, the visual hierarchy was not clear, the journey line was fragmented, and the themes were buried.

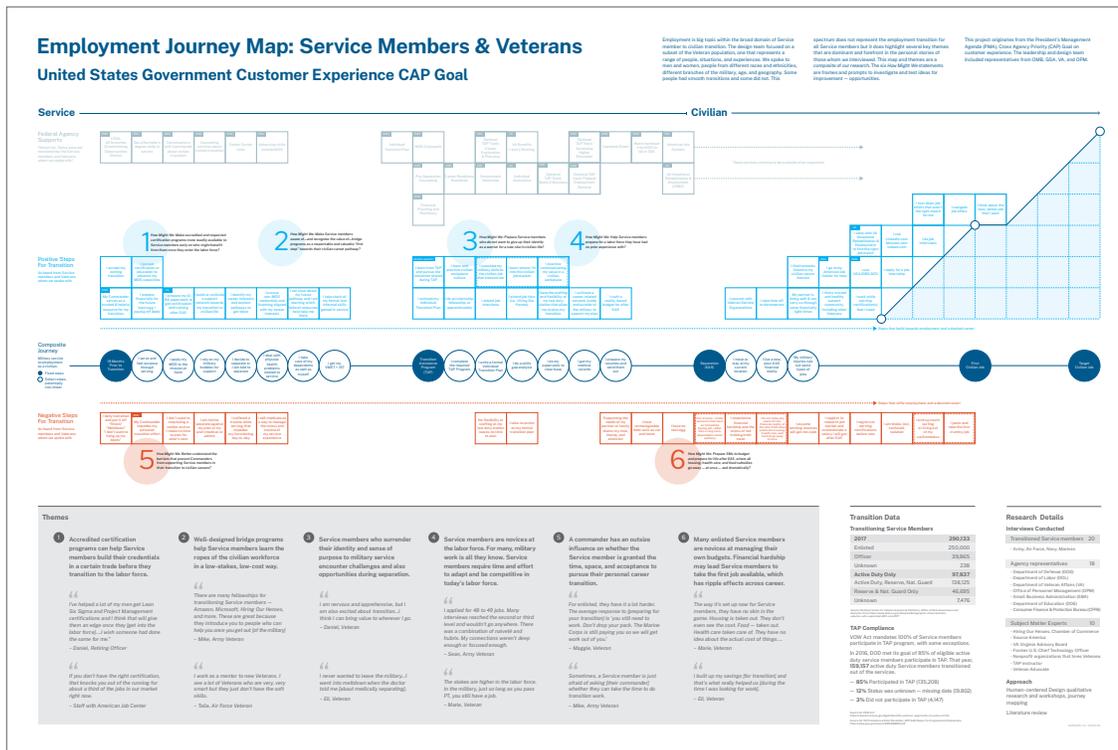


Figure 14 — First draft of the journey map; shared with stakeholders at our synthesis workshop

Again, we asked, “What’s the priority here?” We came back to our North Star—the transition experiences we heard from service members, including the:

- Phases of their journey towards meaningful work in the labor market;
- Building blocks that helped them along the way;
- Stumbling blocks that got in their way.

We decided that our customer journey map needed to prioritize the service member’s perspective and transition journey, and provide the timeline of resources and supports offered by key federal agencies as the background. After all, the agencies are serving the service members. In addition, the project sought to evaluate their experience and needs so that agencies could respond to them—not the other way around.

Finally (Figure 15), we created at the bottom of the map a section, called “Research Themes”, where we shared our six most important findings and recommendations for what federal agencies could do next with these key findings.

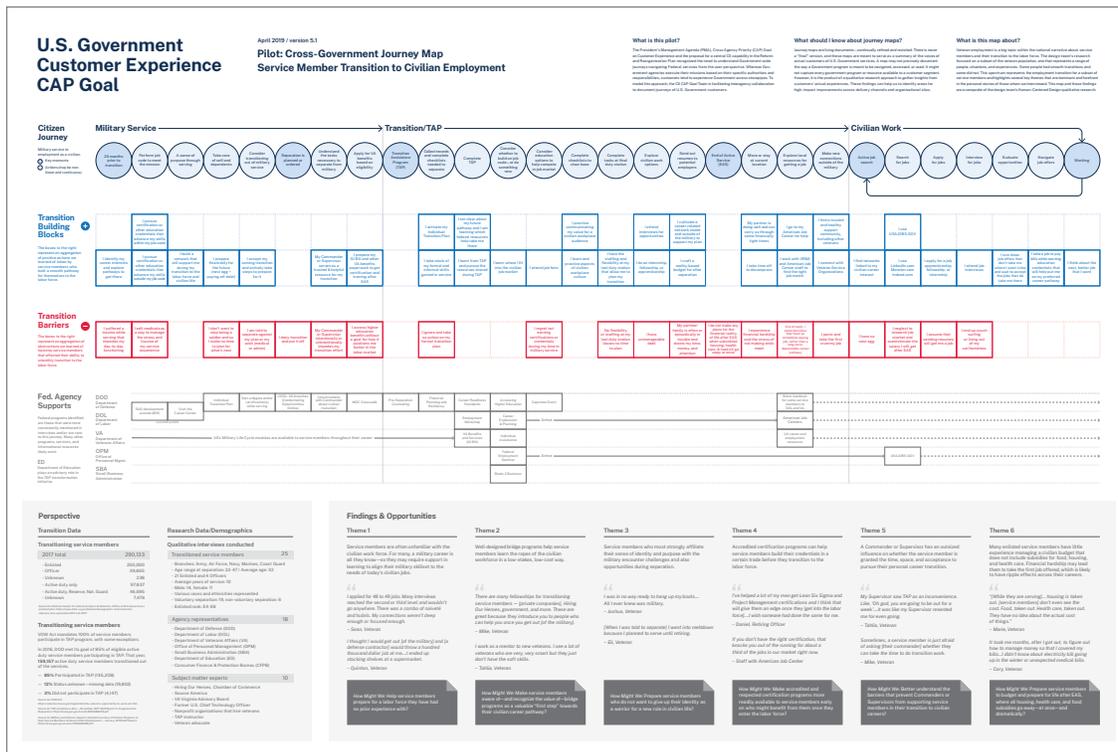


Figure 15 — Final draft of the journey map (larger version on following pages)

U.S. Government Customer Experience CAP Goal

April 2019 / version 5.1

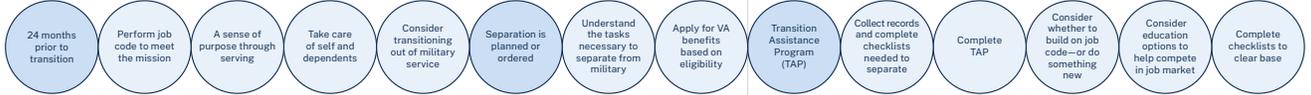
Pilot: Cross-Government Journey Map Service Member Transition to Civilian Employment

Citizen Journey

Military service to employment as a civilian.
 ● Key moments
 ○ Actions (may be non-linear and continuous)

Military Service

Transition/TAP



Transition Building Blocks

The boxes to the right represent an aggregation of positive actions we learned of taken by service members who built a smooth pathway for themselves to the labor force.

I identify my career interests and explore pathways to get there	I pursue certification or other education credentials that advance my skills within my job code	I build a network that will support me during my transition to the labor force and civilian life	I prepare financially for the future (nest egg + paying off debt)	I accept my coming transition and actively take steps to prepare for it	My Commander or Supervisor serves as a trusted & helpful resource for my transition	I prepare my GI Bill and other VA benefits paperwork to get certification and training after EAS	I activate my Individual Transition Plan	I am clear about my future pathway and I am learning which federal resources help take me there	I learn where I fit into the civilian job market	I attend job fairs	I practice communicating my value for a civilian workplace audience
I take stock of my formal and informal skills gained in service	I learn from TAP and pursue the resources shared during TAP	I learn where I fit into the civilian job market	I regret not earning certifications or credentials during my time in military service								

Transition Barriers

The boxes to the right represent an aggregation of obstructions we learned of faced by service members that affected their ability to smoothly transition to the labor force.

I suffered a trauma while serving that impedes my day-to-day functioning	I self-medicate as a way to manage the stress and trauma of my service experience	I don't want to stop being a soldier and so I make no time to plan for what's next	I am told to separate against my plan or my wish (medical or admin)	I deny transition and put it off	My Commander or Supervisor intentionally or unintentionally impedes my transition effort	I access higher education benefits without a goal for how it positions me better in the labor market	I ignore and take no action on my formal transition plan				
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Fed. Agency Supports

Federal programs identified are those that were most consistently mentioned in interviews and/or are core to this journey. Many other programs, services, and informational resources likely exist.

ED Department of Education plays an advisory role in the TAP transformation initiative

DOD Department of Defense	Individual Transition Plan	Earn a degree and/or certification(s) while serving	COOL: All branches (Credentialing Opportunities Online)	Conversations with Commander about civilian transition	MOC Crosswalk	Pre-Separation Counseling	Financial planning and Resiliency	Career Readiness Standards	Accessing Higher Education	Capstone Event
DOL Department of Labor	Skill development outside MOS	Visit the Career Center						Employment Workshop	Career Exploration & Planning	Active
VA Department of Veterans Affairs								VA Benefits and Services (GI Bill)	Individual Assistance	
OPM Office of Personnel Mgmt.									Federal Employment Seminar	Active
SBA Small Business Administration									Boots 2 Business	

Perspective

Transition Data

Transitioning service members

2017 total	290,133
- Enlisted	250,000
- Officer	39,865
- Unknown	238
- Active duty only	97,837
- Active duty, Reserve, Nat. Guard	46,695
- Unknown	7,476

Source for National Center for Veterans Analysis & Statistics, Office of Data Management and Analytics: <https://www.data.va.gov/dataset/demographic-characteristics-veterans-who-separated-2011-and-2017>

Transitioning service members

VOW Act mandates 100% of service members participate in TAP program, with some exceptions.

In 2016, DOD met its goal of 85% of eligible active duty service members participating in TAP. That year, 159,157 active duty service members transitioned out of the services.

- 85% Participated in TAP (135,208)
- 12% Status unknown—missing data (19,802)
- 3% Did not participate in TAP (4,147)

Source for VOW Act: <https://www.veterans.house.gov/legislation/the-veterans-opportunity-to-work-act.htm>

Source for TAP compliance data — November, 2017 GAO Report to Congressional Requesters: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/688203.pdf>

Source for Military and Veteran Support, Detailed Inventory of Federal Programs to Help Service Members Achieve Civilian Employment — January, 2018 GAO Report: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/696499.pdf>

Research Data/Demographics

Qualitative interviews conducted

Transitioned service members	25
- Branches: Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard	
- Age range at separation: 22-47 / Average age: 32	
- 21 Enlisted and 4 Officers	
- Average years of service: 10	
- Male: 14, female: 11	
- Various races and ethnicities represented	
- Voluntary separation: 19, non-voluntary separation: 6	
- Enlisted rank: E4-E8	

Agency representatives

- Department of Defense (DOD)
- Department of Labor (DOL)
- Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
- Office of Personnel Management (OPM)
- Small Business Administration (SBA)
- Department of Education (ED)
- Consumer Finance & Protection Bureau (CFPB)

Subject matter experts

- Hiring Our Heroes, Chamber of Commerce
- Source America
- VA Virginia Advisory Board
- Former U.S. Chief Technology Officer
- Nonprofit organizations that hire veterans
- TAP instructor
- Veteran advocate

Findings & Opportunities

Theme 1

Service members are often unfamiliar with the civilian work force. For many, a military career is all they know—so they may require support in learning to align their military skillset to the needs of today's civilian jobs.

“

I applied for 48 to 49 jobs. Many interviews reached the second or third level and wouldn't go anywhere. There was a combo of naiveté and hubris. My connections weren't deep enough or focused enough.

— Sean, Veteran

I thought I would get out [of the military] and [a defense contractor] would throw a hundred thousand dollar job at me... I ended up stocking shelves at a supermarket.

— Quinton, Veteran

How Might We: Help service members prepare for a labor force they have had no prior experience with?

Theme 2

Well-designed bridge programs help service members learn the ropes of the civilian workforce in a low-stakes, low-cost way.

“

There are many fellowships for transitioning service members — [private companies], Hiring Our Heroes, government, and more. These are great because they introduce you to people who can help you once you get out [of the military].

— Mike, Veteran

I work as a mentor to new veterans. I see a lot of veterans who are very, very smart but they just don't have the soft skills.

— Tahlia, Veteran

How Might We: Make service members aware of—and recognize the value of—bridge programs as a valuable “first step” towards their civilian career pathway?

What is this pilot?

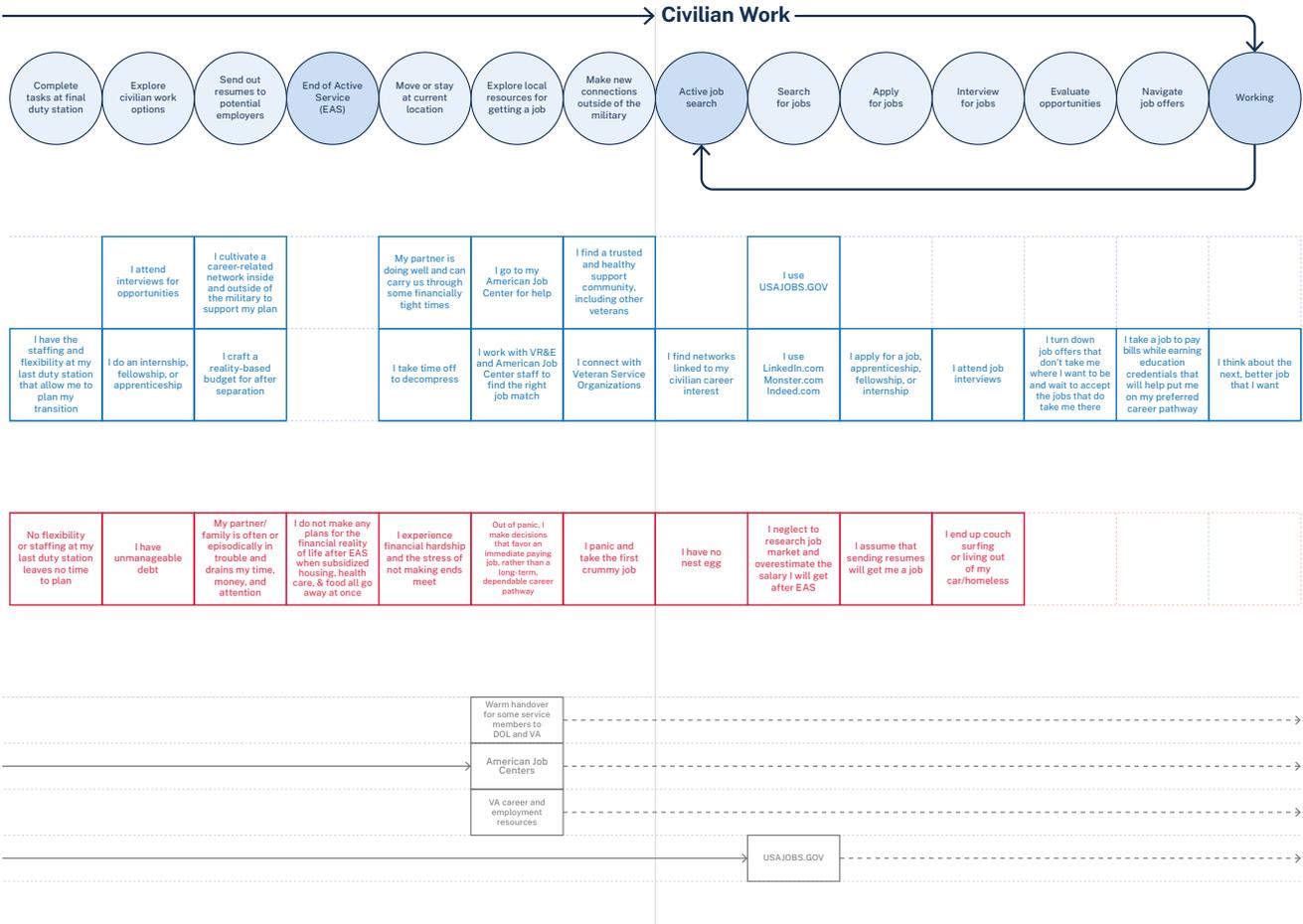
The President's Management Agenda (PMA), Cross Agency Priority (CAP) Goal on Customer Experience and the proposal for a central CX capability in the Reform and Reorganization Plan recognized the need to understand Government-wide journeys navigating Federal services from the user perspective. Whereas Government agencies execute their missions based on their specific authorities and responsibilities, customers tend to experience Government across stovepipes. To model this approach, the CX CAP Goal Team is facilitating interagency collaboration to document journeys of U.S. Government customers.

What should I know about journey maps?

Journey maps are living documents—continually refined and revisited. There is never a "final" version, and these maps are meant to serve as a summary of the voices of actual customers of U.S. Government services. A map may not precisely document the way a Government program is meant to be navigated, accessed, or used. It might not capture every government program or resource available to a customer segment. However, it is the product of a qualitative research approach to gather insights from customers' actual experiences. These findings can help us to identify areas for high-impact improvements across delivery channels and organizational silos.

What is this map about?

Veteran employment is a big topic within the national narrative about service members and their transition to the labor force. The design team's research focused on a subset of the veteran population, one that represents a range of people, situations, and experiences. Some people had smooth transitions and some did not. This spectrum represents the employment transition for a subset of service members and highlights several key themes that are dominant and forefront in the personal stories of those whom we interviewed. This map and these findings are a composite of the design team's Human-Centered Design qualitative research.



Theme 3

Service members who most strongly affiliate their sense of identity and purpose with the military encounter challenges and also opportunities during separation.

“ I was in no way ready to hang up my boots... All I ever knew was military. — Joshua, Veteran

[When I was told to separate] I went into meltdown because I planned to serve until retiring. — Eli, Veteran

How Might We: Prepare service members who do not want to give up their identity as a warrior for a new role in civilian life?

Theme 4

Accredited certification programs can help service members build their credentials in a certain trade before they transition to the labor force.

“ I've helped a lot of my men get Lean Six Sigma and Project Management certifications and I think that will give them an edge once they [get into the labor force]...I wish someone had done the same for me. — Daniel, Retiring Officer

If you don't have the right certification, that knocks you out of the running for about a third of the jobs in our market right now. — Staff with American Job Center

How Might We: Make accredited and respected certification programs more readily available to service members early on who might benefit from them once they enter the labor force?

Theme 5

A Commander or Supervisor has an outsized influence on whether the service member is granted the time, space, and acceptance to pursue their personal career transition.

“ My Supervisor saw TAP as an inconvenience. Like, 'Oh god, you are going to be out for a week'...it was like my Supervisor resented me for even going. — Tahlia, Veteran

Sometimes, a service member is just afraid of asking [their commander] whether they can take the time to do transition work. — Mike, Veteran

How Might We: Better understand the barriers that prevent Commanders or Supervisors from supporting service members in their transition to civilian careers?

Theme 6

Many enlisted service members have little experience managing a civilian budget that does not include subsidies for food, housing, and health care. Financial hardship may lead them to take the first job offered, which is likely to have ripple effects across their careers.

“ [While they are serving]... housing is taken out. [service members] don't even see the cost. Food, taken out. Health care, taken out. They have no idea about the actual cost of things.” — Marie, Veteran

It took me months, after I got out, to figure out how to manage money so that I covered my bills...I didn't know about electricity bill going up in the winter or unexpected medical bills. — Cory, Veteran

How Might We: Prepare service members to budget and prepare for life after EAS, where all housing, health care, and food subsidies go away—at once—and dramatically?

CONCLUSION: TAKING THE WORK FURTHER

The goal of this effort has been to understand the needs of veterans seeking employment after military service and to experiment with new ways of working together in government. By inviting all of our stakeholders to provide feedback at key moments in our research, we were able to build the credibility of our process, and by extension, build credibility around the map itself.

The map does not offer solutions to the problem of transitioning service members who struggle to find and secure good jobs when they get back home. Rather, it is a resource that can provide insights about which factors are likely to help service members towards a smooth transition, and which ones are likely to lead towards a rocky transition.

Different groups can tap the value of the map for different purposes:

- **Service members** can learn from the journeys of others who have transitioned into the labor market, and they can see how taking earlier advantage of certain federal resources can help pave a smoother pathway towards career transition.
- **Staff with federal agencies** can see the positive impact that results from making career transition resources available and known to service members well before the TAP program. They can reflect on their timeline of service offerings and how to better harmonize those offerings with service members' transition journey.
- **Agency staff** overseeing budgets can use the map to inform their process for evaluating plans and programs.
- **Design teams** can tap our project work for insights that will help advance collaborative design projects well into the future.

The creation of the journey map signals the starting point—rather than ending point—of our work. Our next step is to help federal agencies decide which of the map's key findings they'd like to focus on, such as:

- Help supervisors better prepare service members for the career transition?
- Make fellowships, apprenticeships, and internships available to more service members
- Ensure that more service members are earning credentials that will help them better compete in the labor market?

No matter the selected finding, we will work toward ensuring service members have a firm footing to start their new chapter in life.

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