



## OUTREACH STRATEGIES

### Introduction

In the homeless assistance field, the term “outreach” usually refers specifically to street outreach offered to individuals experiencing homelessness who are not engaged in services through conventional activities. Traditionally, outreach has involved distributing brochures and combing streets and places where individuals experiencing homelessness might congregate—all activities designed to reach those in need of services. Although such “on-the-street” interaction can help raise veterans’ awareness of employment services, a review of the literature indicates that effective outreach for veterans who are experiencing homelessness encompasses a broader range of activities.

The United States Department of Labor’s (DOL) Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) defines outreach as “an active effort by program staff to encourage individuals in the designated service area to avail themselves of program services” (U.S. Department of Labor, undated, VWIP-Glossary). To that end, HVRP staff must promote active engagement with industry, employers, employer associations, and stakeholders in the community, in addition to veterans experiencing homelessness.

There are a number of reasons why outreach is important to HVRP. In 2013, HVRPs assessed 28,849 veterans, of which 59 percent (or 16,106) were enrolled in programs across the country. This suggests that not all identified veterans are enrolled in HVRP and means that HVRPs must assess a lot of veterans in order to enroll enough eligible ones to meet their goals. Outreach is also necessary to engage employers in need of the skilled labor that veterans can provide. Finally, outreach is important as a means for promoting HVRP among other service providers, funding sources, and local governments. Through outreach, HVRPs can inform groups about the services offered, the results of services, and other information relevant to their concerns. A spin-off of outreach is “in-reaching,”

which entails visits by HVRP staff to homeless shelters, jails, transitional housing, and other settings to identify veterans who are homeless.

HVRPs can use a variety of strategies, including orientation sessions, public service announcements, radio advertisements, newspaper stories, and social media. Outreach is conducted at Stand-Down events, shelters, transitional housing, day centers, job fairs, college campuses, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and elsewhere. Outreach is provided by program leaders, case managers, employment specialists, veteran peer specialists, job developers, and others. However, little (if any) research is available about which outreach efforts done by who are superior or less effective in engaging veterans who are homeless in employment services. For the moment, we take our cue from consensus in the field and draw on research that has been done on other populations or other types of outreach.

In Best Practice (BP) #2, we review relevant research evidence to inform outreach practices, outline tips for successful outreach, and offer resources and cool tools. You can learn from your peers by watching “At Your Service” video clips, in which HVRP staff members talk about their best approaches to outreach. Of course, we welcome your comments and suggestions for best practices in reaching out to veterans who are homeless, employers, and stakeholders.

## References

Olivet, J., Bassuk, E., Elstad, E., Kenney, R., & Jassil, L. (2010). Outreach and engagement in homeless services: A review of the literature. *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal*, 3, 53-70.

U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment & Training Service. (Undated). *Veteran workforce investment program (VWIP) – Glossary*. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov/vets/grants/grant3/glossary.htm>

---

# NVTAC

National Veterans Technical Assistance Center

View more NVTAC success stories at [NVTAC.org](http://NVTAC.org)