ARA

Transition Checklist for Veterans

Public Service Transition Program · November 2026

HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

This checklist is for service members preparing to separate or retire and for veterans already in transition, including veterans leaving a civilian government job. Work through the sections that match your timeline, and check items off as you finish them. In the Word version, click a box to check it.

The items are general reminders, not legal or benefits advice. Programs and deadlines change, so confirm every date with the office responsible for it.

Twelve months or more before you leave

- ☐ Write down your expected separation or retirement date, and the dates of any terminal leave you plan to take.
- ☐ Start the Transition Assistance Program. It must begin no later than 365 days before your separation date, and starting earlier gives you more time.
- ☐ Decide your goal: a job with a private employer or nonprofit, consulting, a business of your own, or more education. If you are not ready to decide, set a date to decide.
- ☐ Request copies of your service records, evaluations, award citations, and training records, and download your Joint Services Transcript or Community College of the Air Force transcript.
- ☐ Build a monthly budget for the transition, including any gap in pay and the cost of health coverage.
- ☐ If you want to transfer Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to a spouse or child, ask about it now. Transfers must be requested while you are still serving and usually require additional service.
- ☐ Consider whether service in the National Guard or Reserve fits your plans.

Six to twelve months before you leave

- ☐ Complete the Skills Translation Worksheet and a first draft of your résumé.
- ☐ Collect three to five postings for the role you want, or describe your first client if you plan to work for yourself.
- ☐ Update your LinkedIn profile in civilian terms, and begin informational interviews with people in the field you want to enter.
- ☐ Ask your transition office about DoD SkillBridge, which is open to service members in their last 180 days of service with command approval. Applications and approvals take time, so ask early.
- ☐ Create your sign-in account for VA.gov so that you can apply for benefits online.

180 to 90 days before you leave

- ☐ If you have a service-connected condition, file a disability claim through Benefits Delivery at Discharge, which accepts claims 180 to 90 days before separation. A VA-accredited representative can help at no cost.
- ☐ Complete your separation health assessment, and get a copy of your service treatment records.

- ☐ Plan health coverage for yourself and your family. Ask whether you qualify for the Transitional Assistance Management Program, which provides 180 days of transitional TRICARE coverage to certain separating members. If you will buy coverage through the Continued Health Care Benefit Program, you must enroll within 60 days of losing TRICARE or transitional coverage. Retirees should confirm their TRICARE retiree enrollment.
- ☐ Apply for VA health care, and learn which other VA benefits you may be eligible for.
- ☐ Plan for life insurance. You can convert Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance to Veterans' Group Life Insurance within one year and 120 days after separation, and you will not be asked health questions if you apply within 240 days.

Final 90 days

- ☐ Review the draft of your DD Form 214 carefully before you sign it, and store certified copies in a safe place.
- ☐ Tailor your résumé for each application, and prepare three interview stories using the situation, task, action, and result method.
- ☐ Confirm the dates when your pay, health coverage, and life insurance change, and put each deadline on your calendar.
- ☐ Update your mailing address and contact information with the VA and with your service's pay office.
- ☐ If you may need unemployment compensation after you leave, learn how to apply through your state workforce agency, which administers the program for former service members.

After you leave

- ☐ Apply for a Veteran ID Card through VA.gov if you want photo proof of service that does not require carrying your DD Form 214.
- ☐ Contact your state's veterans affairs office about state benefits. In New Jersey, that office is the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.
- ☐ Check your calendar for the life insurance and health coverage deadlines above.
- ☐ Visit an American Job Center, where staff who specialize in veterans' employment can help with your search.

Your first months in a new role

- ☐ Learn how decisions are made, how work is assigned, and how performance is measured in your new organization.
- ☐ Ask your supervisor for feedback early, rather than waiting for a formal review.
- ☐ Decide how and when you want to talk about your service at work. What you share is your choice.
- ☐ If you need a workplace accommodation, learn your rights and options through the Job Accommodation Network.
- ☐ Keep in touch with your network, and update your résumé every six months.

Where to get help

Other program materials. The Résumé and CV Guide, the interview guides, the worksheets and checklists, the Referral Guide, and the résumé and cover letter templates are available to download at library.agardresearchassociates.org/public-service-transition.

One-on-one help. If you would like one of the program's directors to read your materials and help you tailor them to the jobs you are applying for, request one-on-one help through the program page at agardresearchassociates.org/public-service-transition. Requests are reviewed on a rolling basis as volunteer time allows, and veterans are served first.

If you are in crisis or worried about someone, help is available at any hour. Veterans, service members, and their families can reach the Veterans Crisis Line by dialing 988 and pressing 1, or by texting 838255. Anyone can call or text 988 for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

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