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Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

- Employment First Initiative View project
- StartUP NY View project
EXPLORING HOW DOWNTOWN EMPLOYERS CAN HIRE HOMELESS VETERANS

Field Report: August 2013
BY: GARY SHAHEEN, MPA AND JOHN RIO, MA, CRC

INTRODUCTION
The International Downtown Association (IDA) published a compendium of best practices to address street homelessness through partnerships with downtown employers and homeless services providers (“Addressing Homelessness,” 2000). That report underscored the importance of developing planning partnerships where both businesses and the social sector have a stake in reducing or eliminating street homelessness. Since that document was published in 2000, many of the root causes of homelessness continue to affect downtowns across the nation in small and large urban centers.

Downtown employers often participate in programs designed to enhance downtown business districts to improve livability, tourism, economic development and safety. Often referred to as a business improvement district (BID), a BID is a defined geographic area within which businesses pay an additional tax or fee in order to fund projects within the district’s boundaries. Grant funds acquired by the city for programs and/or incentives, such as tax abatements, can be made available to businesses or to recruit new business. BIDs may go by other names, such as business improvement area (BIA), business revitalization zone (BRZ), community improvement district (CID), or downtown management district. The IDA is a membership or trade association for BIDs.

The purpose of the Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program (HVRP) is to provide services to assist in reintegrating homeless veterans into meaningful employment within the labor force and to stimulate the development of effective service delivery systems that will address the complex problems facing homeless veterans. Grantees provide an array of services to help veterans not only succeed at work, but to access permanent housing by utilizing a case management approach that directly assists homeless veterans and provides critical linkages for a variety of supportive services available in their local communities. The program is “employment-focused” and veterans receive the employment and training services they need in order to re-enter the labor force. Job placement, training, job development, career counseling, and resume preparation are among the services that are provided.

In this field report, we explore opportunities for HVRPs and BIDs to collaborate and secure jobs for veterans who are homeless. This is a preliminary report that opens the door to future and more extensive inquiry and data collection that improves understanding of how, when and why these partnerships are formed, what conditions must be in place to improve employment outcomes for homeless veterans, and results in a more extensive field guide for communities to develop HVRP/downtown employer partnerships. Where such partnerships are fledgling, we suggest stimulating collaboration to not only support HVRPs to get jobs for their participants, but to increase our knowledge and demonstrate how these partnerships can be replicated by HVRPs and BIDs in other communities.

SHARE Your Thoughts
Please share your thoughts about this field report and your interest in an MI training series to Gary Shaheen, MPA, Director of Community Based Technical Support Initiatives, Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University, at gshahee@syr.edu.

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NOTE: From 2010-2013 the IVMF and its partners Syracuse University, the Burton Blatt Institute and Advocates for Human Potential Inc. provided training and technical assistance to Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Programs as the National Veterans TA Center. This was done under a cooperative with the U.S. Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service.
The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Point in Time (PIT) count indicated that approximately 60,000 veterans are homeless on a given night ("2012 PIT Estimates," 2012). Understanding the factors that lead to homelessness is not easy considering the heterogeneity of the population and the fact that there are many pathways to homelessness. Four states account for nearly half of all homeless veterans: California, Florida, New York and Texas. Certain urban centers, for a variety of reasons, have high number of homeless veterans on their streets on any given night. In Table 1, we see the number of homeless veterans from the PIT count in 11 communities.

**TABLE 1. COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH NUMBERS OF HOMELESS VETERANS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>POINT IN TIME COUNT</th>
<th>POINT IN TIME COUNT</th>
<th>% OF TOTAL HOMELESS POPULATION THAT ARE VETERANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles*</td>
<td>6,371</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>5,790</td>
<td>735</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Vegas*</td>
<td>1,303</td>
<td>10,538</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>1,232</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>1,162</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix*</td>
<td>852</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tampa*</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit*</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The unemploy rate for veterans who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces at any time since September 2001—referred to as Gulf War Era II veterans—declined by 2.2 percentage points to 9.9 percent in 2012. Recent data indicates that the gap between veteran and non-veteran unemployment is narrowing to roughly equivalent levels ("The Employment Situation of Veterans," 2013). Veterans served in homeless programs have higher unemployment rates (ranging between 19% and 29%) compared to veterans in general (Perl 2013).

Within the high rates of veteran unemployment and veteran homelessness, we see an opportunity to reduce both of these by linking homeless veterans, employment service providers, BIDs and downtown employers. During program year 2012, the number of HVRP participants receiving employment-related training and services was 15,951 (an 11% increase over FY 2009) and the number of veterans who were placed in employment was 9,477 (12% increase). While the placement rate remained the same at 59 percent, the employment retention rate rose slightly from 62 to 64 percent. During fiscal year 2012, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Homeless Veterans Supported Employment Program (HVSEP) provided employment services to 12,815 homeless veterans (Data from VA Decision Support System). Of the 3,018 veterans discharged from HVSEP in that same year, 37.3 percent were competitively-employed (Data from Northeast Program Evaluation Center). Although veterans can be dually enrolled in HVRP and HVSEP, these programs make referrals to each other, but are not presently involved in any intensive collaboration.

Access to training and employment opportunities that pay a living wage is crucial to preventing or exiting homelessness for veterans. Just as joblessness is a cause of homelessness, employment is a remedy. The income from a job can help one climb out of homelessness or even avoid it. More than a daily activity and a source of money, employment offers other valuable commodities. Most notably, it is a source of self-esteem, and the receipt of a paycheck serves to validate one’s membership in society. Absent employment, veterans can be isolated, experience increased health problems, fail to have a safe and affordable place to live, and remain stuck in the cycle of poverty. As this paper suggests, when people are visibly homeless, downtown business owners become concerned for the customer-friendly environment they wish to promote. Homelessness is not only a bad condition for individuals, it can also be bad for business.

The public perception of homelessness includes the view that people who are homeless are not only a burden, but that their mental illness and/or struggles with substance abuse are too significant to overcome; and that employment is something best addressed only after treatment reduces or eliminates these issues. There is no doubt that these issues, combined with lack of marketable job skills, are formidable barriers to getting and keeping a job. But, to put the issues in perspective, similar perceptions existed regarding housing acquisition. New research—and practice—particularly, the ‘Housing First’ model demonstrates that providing adequate housing to the homeless population, without requiring treatment pre-requisites, can help provide many homeless veterans with the motivation to address all of the other issues that once stood in the way of maintaining stable housing.

Since the publication of the IODA’s 2000 report, a number of BIDs and their Downtown Employer Associations remain as partners in addressing downtown homelessness. These partnerships primarily focus on diversion activities (like drop-in shelters), working with police departments to provide alternatives for people arrested for minor offenses including loitering, panhandling or nuisance crimes. In a handful of cases, employers recognized that they could meet some of their business-related needs if their partnership with homeless services agencies also included providing employment. The IODA report cited examples that primarily involved around contractual arrangements between BIDs and homeless services providers for street cleaning, passing out flyers and leaflets, providing directions for tourists, and assisting in security measures such as checking doors and locks, and reporting problems to the police.

A BID/HVRP partnership is a win-win strategy. Employers hire qualified job candidates and want their downtown streets to be welcoming and experienced safely. Homeless veterans need income and purposeful activity. By joining forces, there is a mutual benefit to employers and veterans, as well as BIDs and HVSEPs. Addressing street homelessness through employment and consequently reducing visible street homelessness takes on added importance if the downtowns are struggling to compete for customers with shopping malls or upscale open malls. However, it appears from preliminary discussions that most of these partnerships, including those that involve job development, are not focused exclusively on the employment of veterans who are homeless. It appears to be a job on the to-do list, even with the employment-focused partnerships we highlight below, to focus their employment efforts on veterans who are homeless.

Although we have not found examples in this preliminary scan of veteran-focused downtown partnerships, we did hear from almost all of the HVRPs and BIDs we talked with, and from the IODA 2012 conference audience where we presented on homeless veterans partnerships, that there was an interest in learning more about partnership possibilities and about how they can be implemented. This preliminary scan “plows the ground” for a more in-depth national study on lessons learned and challenges encountered by implementing downtown partnerships. While numerous national employer initiatives, including the JPMorgan Chase 100,000 Jobs Mission, focus on hiring veterans that are primarily newly transitioned from military service, job development for veterans who are homeless is more likely to occur locally within communities where they are more visible, and where both HVRPs and local businesses have a stake in the outcome. A more in depth follow-up study to this preliminary scan could guide future HVRP/downtown association collaborations that help veterans who are homeless obtain and sustain part, and full-time employment in downtown businesses. For veterans, HVRPs, and downtown businesses it is a win-win outcome.

**PROMISING AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS**

**NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA**

KURT WEIGLE, PRESIDENT & CEO

Downtown Development District of New Orleans (DDD) was created by the Louisiana Legislature in 1974 as the nation’s first assessment-based BID to provide enhanced services in economic development, cleaning and safety. Governed by an elected board of commissioners, the HHD serves the needs of businesses and citizens in the downtown corridor. Its mission is to drive the development of downtown New Orleans, and be the catalyst for a prosperous, stimulating, innovative heart of the Crescent City. Their mission is carried out through a number of critical initiatives, such as making the area is clean and safe, promoting downtown as a destination for tourism and business meetings, as well as a source of enjoyment for residents. It is concerned about the economic vitality of the area and seeks to expand business development in a livable downtown.

There are two organizations that focus on employment services for homeless veterans in New Orleans. We have met with the Volunteers of America, which operates the Supportive Services for Veterans and Their Families (SSVF) grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). We also met with the Compensated Work Therapy program at the VA Medical Center that includes the HVSEP. These two programs make referrals to each other, but are not presently involved in any intensive collaboration.
The Houston Downtown Management District (HDMID) is a municipal management district whose boundaries are represented largely by the freeway ring around the central business core of Houston. HDMID has access to tax-exempt financing, immunity from torts claims, and other benefits. The entity is a body politic and corporate of the State of Texas, and is run by a 20-member board of directors that represents property owners, managers and tenants in downtown. Various city department heads serve in an ex-officio, non-voting capacity on the board. The downtown district is staffed under contract with Central Houston, Inc. The downtown district operates under five-year service plans funded by assessments for both services and major capital improvements. Significant contracts include: Texas Avenue Streetscape Improvements, betterments associated with Metro’s Downtown Transit Streets Improvement Project, and the City of Houston’s Cintec waterproofing project.

The ‘Clean and Safe’ program is not a program specifically for veterans who are homeless. Lynnae Berg is the Executive Director of Clean and Safe, and Vice President of Downtown Services for the Portland Business Alliance and its Downtown ‘Clean and Safe District’ ([http://www.cleansandsafe.pdx.com/ABOUT/about-the-district.html](http://www.cleansandsafe.pdx.com/ABOUT/about-the-district.html)). From its website: “The Clean & Safe District encompasses a 213-block area of downtown and is one of the oldest, largest and most successful business improvement districts in the nation. Businesses within this area elected to pay a fee to raise money that supplements publicly-financed services for neighborhood improvement, including cleaning, security, community justice services, market research and retail advocacy.” The Portland Business Alliance recognized the need to make the downtown area more attractive to customers and address a host of livability issues including panhandling, off-putting behaviors, and visible self-medicating. A recent business census survey recorded that the majority of businesses rate downtown homelessness as a major challenge. In partnership with Central City Concern (CCC), ([http://www.centralcityconcern.org/](http://www.centralcityconcern.org/)) the Homeless-to-Work Program ([http://www.cleansandsafe.pdx.com/CLEANING-SECURITY/doing.html](http://www.cleansandsafe.pdx.com/CLEANING-SECURITY/doing.html)) offers training and employment opportunities to workers that are formerly homeless or have other barriers to employment. ‘Clean and Safe’ crews provide sidewalk sweeping, graffiti removal, litter and cigarette removal, and pressure washing services in the district. A volunteer corps for people who want to test job preferences through work site observation has been established through the partnership. Opportunities open up next for volunteers to move to training positions that can turn into part- or full-time employment with the Alliance as union-scale cleaners. ‘Clean and Safe’ is not a veteran-only program but CCL serves veterans who are homeless through its regular homeless assistance program. Four of their non-veteran participants have taken job positions as cleaners hired by the Alliance, including some that have graduated from cleaner to cleaner-supervising positions. The CCC Clean and Safe’ partnership also includes linkages for mental health and substance abuse treatment.

The partnership between the Alliance and CCC has generated other positive outcomes beyond providing people who are homeless, including veterans, with jobs. The Alliance is so committed to reducing homelessness in downtown Portland that they are a committed advocate for more comprehensive homelessness shelter and housing and preventative services, including writing letters of support for homeless services agencies to secure or prevent loss of funding. Their advocacy also includes using their connections with the city’s Ending Chronic Homelessness Planning Council to promote the value of helping people who are homeless get jobs, citing the importance of job creation to the city’s economy.

When asked about job opportunities other than cleaner positions, Lynnae offered that there are a number of property developers and property managers on the board, including one who recently offered to consider opening jobs in building management to CCC-referred individuals. Another job option open to those participating in ‘Clean and Safe’ is sidewalk ambassador, which would provide the employee with minimum wage and benefits.

Ambassadors help tourists and others find their way around town and distribute merchant literature. Through a contract with a security provider, jobs as security staff with the Portland Patrol can also be available for interested and qualified individuals. However, of the three security staff hired through the partnership, none are vets.

The ‘Clean and Safe’ program is not a program specifically for veterans who are homeless. Lynnae offered that she did not know how many veterans who are homeless were living in downtown, or were served by homeless services agencies. She agreed that hiring veterans qualified to meet employer job expectations could be attractive to some employers, but they have not yet been engaged in that effort. More work should be done to help employers realize how many homeless veterans are in need of work and what types of jobs they can be trained and supported to fill. It could be very possible that a focused discussion engaging Alliance members in an effort to reduce employment among veterans who are homeless could occur, but as yet these discussions and planning meetings have not happened. Lynnae is very supportive of the ‘Clean and Safe’ employment initiatives and believes that they are making a difference in improving downtown livability through employment of the homeless population and helping to strengthen homeless supportive services; however, serving homeless veterans in particular is not on their radar screen at this point in time. Nonetheless, she would like to learn more about the ways that ‘Clean and Safe’ can better understand the skills and needs of homeless veterans and help them.
SUMMARY

In this field report, we presented possibilities and opportunities to revitalize and build on partnerships established between homeless services providers, including some HVRPs and downtown BIDs. BIDs often meet some of their needs by contracting out services like street cleaning to agencies that use these jobs as early employment re-entry options. Both HVRPs and BIDs that we talked with indicate that more discussion is needed to expand these partnerships and leverage individual jobs for veterans who are homeless. As trade membership organizations, downtown districts can add a service to their members by brokering linkages between employers and their needs for qualified job candidates, with employment intermediaries who can supply those job candidates. HVRPs with their capacity to sponsor on-the-job training and support veterans who are homeless and ready to work can be a good source for employees. Through this initial exploration we conclude that facilitating such collaboration and helping HVRP grantees develop these partnerships with BIDs is likely to bring about benefits for homeless veterans and the communities in which they live. In addition to expanding upon this brief overview, we believe that working with the IDA, BIDs and HVRPs can result in outcomes benefitting both businesses and veterans.

QUESTIONS USED TO EXPLORE DOWNTOWN PARTNERSHIPS

STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS:

• Do you have partnership agreements?
• What are the key features of these agreements?
• Do they specifically address employment?
• If not, is helping people who are homeless get jobs either within the downtown association or under contract to the association part of the partnership?
• Does the partnership also include leveraging jobs with downtown association business members?
• Do these partners focus specifically on helping veterans who are homeless get jobs in the association, under contract with the association and/or with association members?
• If not, do these employment partnerships serve veterans who are homeless?
• Do these placements come through your HVRP?
• If so, how many veterans who are homeless got jobs during the past year?
• What types of jobs are most frequently offered?
• How many of these veterans received job training (on-the-job and/or classroom) as a feature of these partnerships?
• How many of these veterans who are homeless retained their job for at least 90 days post-placement?
• What is the average wage paid to these employees?
• What do employers say about their satisfaction with the program? HVRP staff? Veterans?

QUALITATIVE:

• What were the primary challenges you faced in developing the employment partnership that serves veterans who are homeless?
• What methods do you use to address these challenges?
• Have you had to adapt your training or placement approaches in any way to help the partnership succeed to meet the needs of homeless veteran job-seekers? Of employers? Please describe these adaptations.
• What methods do you use to market/provide information about the partnership? To veteran job-seekers? To employers? To other groups (Continuum of Care, Chamber of Commerce, etc.)?
• Are there ways that the partnership can be expanded to include more veteran job-seekers? More employers?
• Can you describe how the veteran employment partnership is connected to other employment supportive services like housing, financial literacy, benefits planning, advanced skills training, mental health and/or substance abuse treatment?
• Are your local One Stop and their DOL-VETS staff part of the partnership? Your state VR?
• If so, what role do they fulfill?
• If not, why not?
• What are some of the key factors another city might need to know to replicate a partnership like yours successfully?
• What are some of the key ‘landmines’ they should avoid in order to replicate a successful partnership?
• What other comments do you have that could help us tell your story so that other cities can learn from it?