

FROM SERVICE TO SITE

Veterans: The Workforce the Construction Industry Needs

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Prepared by Voyage Control

The Challenge

Veterans are among the most underemployed professionals in the American workforce. Close to two thirds report working jobs that fall well below their actual skills, experience, and leadership capability within the first five years of leaving the service. The military did not produce undertrained people. The civilian workforce has simply not figured out how to read them.

The Reason

The core of the problem is translation. A Staff Sergeant managing 30 people, accountable for millions of dollars in equipment, and making consequential decisions under pressure does not stop being that person when he hands in his uniform. But a one page civilian resume has no vocabulary for it, and most HR departments have no framework to recognize it. The title means nothing to them. The experience underneath it is invisible.

Credentialing compounds it. Military training is genuinely world class, but it rarely arrives with civilian certificates attached. A combat medic performing procedures that rival a physician's assistant in the field still cannot walk into a clinical role without civilian licensure. The capability is real. The paperwork is not. That gap costs both the Veteran and the employer.

Culture shock does the rest. The military runs on clear hierarchy, defined mission, and individual accountability. Many Veterans enter corporate environments and find ambiguity where there should be direction, politics where there should be standards, and a pace that feels untethered from consequence. The frustration is legitimate. The job hopping it produces looks like instability on a resume. It is not. It is a signal that the fit was wrong, not that the person was.

The Fix

The solution is not complicated, even if it takes commitment. Structured credential translation programs, employer education on reading military resumes, targeted hiring pipelines in industries where Veteran skills land naturally, and mentorship connections into construction, logistics, cybersecurity, transportation, and leadership roles. These are not charity initiatives. They are a talent strategy. The employers who build this infrastructure first will have access to a pipeline their competitors cannot see.

Why Construction

Construction can be a great fit, and not just for the earning potential. Construction teams are deeply mission driven (just like those in the military) — helping create incredible buildings and adding real value to the economy. There's a tangible outcome to the work, something you can point to and say *I built that*. It's even fair to say that walking into a jobsite trailer can be a bit reminiscent of walking into a command post in a forward operating base!

The Case in Three Numbers

Construction firms that cannot find enough workers (AGC, 2025)	92%
Service members who leave the U.S. military every year	200,000
Annual cost of the skilled labor gap in residential construction alone (HBI)	\$10.8B

These three numbers tell the whole story. The construction industry has a structural workforce crisis. The U.S. military produces over 200,000 disciplined, mission-ready people every year who are actively looking for civilian careers. The barrier between them is not capability. It is translation and structure, both of which are solvable. This report tells you how.

The Problem: Construction Industry Unfilled Jobs (End of Year 2025)

Source: BLS JOLTS via NAHB, ABC, Construction Dive

December 2025: End of Year Snapshot

The number of open, unfilled construction sector jobs rose to **292,000** in December 2025, up from 284,000 in November. This represented **3.4% of all construction jobs** going unfilled in the final month of the year, per Bureau of Labor Statistics JOLTS data.

Metric	Value
Open Jobs (December 2025)	292,000
Open Jobs (December 2024)	205,000
Year-over-Year Change	+87,000 (+42.4%)
Job Openings Rate (Dec 2025)	3.4% (vs. 3.2% in Dec 2024)
Hiring Rate (December 2025)	4.2% (outpaced openings rate)

Year-Over-Year Comparison

The December 2025 figure of 292,000 was notably higher than the 205,000 recorded in December 2024 a year-over-year increase of approximately 42%. The job openings rate also ticked up from 3.2% to 3.4%. However, the reading remains measurably lower than two years prior, reflecting the broader cooling trend in construction activity, particularly in residential.

2025 Intra-Year Volatility

The industry experienced significant swings throughout 2025. In August, job openings plunged to just **188,000** ; the lowest rate in nearly a decade, down 115,000 from July and down 116,000 from August 2024. The sharp mid-year decline aligned with a pullback in construction spending and residential activity before recovering in Q4.

Broader Context and Headwinds

Despite the year-end uptick, the broader labor picture remains cautious:

- Fewer construction workers were hired in 2024 and 2025 combined than in any two-year period since 2015–2016.
- Demand for construction workers remained subdued for several consecutive quarters.
- Layoffs edged up modestly from 1.7% to 2.1% in December, per AGC data.
- Tariffs, rising materials costs, increased insurance expenses, and immigration enforcement contributed to labor pressure and wage increases.
- Home building employment declined in the second half of 2025, though non-residential sectors (notably data centers) expanded.

2026 Outlook

Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) projects that construction will need **350,000 net new workers** to meet demand in 2026 — a significant gap, though smaller than in prior years. The workforce deficit remains structural, driven by an aging labor pool, underinvestment in vocational training, and immigration-related constraints on the skilled trades pipeline.

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics JOLTS; National Association of Home Builders (NAHB); Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC); Associated General Contractors of America (AGC); Construction Dive.

The Opportunity

Each year, over 200,000 service members separate from the U.S. military and begin looking for civilian careers. They have spent years being trained and tested in exactly the qualities construction most needs:

What Veterans Bring	Construction Application
Small unit leadership and team management	Directly translates to crew foreman and superintendent roles
Logistics, supply chain, and resource management	Mirrors job site material flow, delivery coordination, and equipment tracking
Safety discipline and risk management	Military Operational Risk Management aligns directly with OSHA frameworks
Mission planning and after-action review	Equivalent to project planning, scheduling, and post-task debriefs
Hands-on construction skills (engineers, Seabees)	Combat engineers and Navy Seabees have direct construction trade experience
Accountability and procedural compliance	Enforced at a level most civilian workplaces cannot replicate

Veterans are not charity cases. They are candidates who have been selected, trained, and tested in ways that most civilian hiring processes cannot replicate. The industry is leaving them, and the solution to its workforce problem, on the table.

The transition is not always smooth. Around 40 to 75% of separating service members report some difficulty adjusting to civilian life. The primary barrier is translation: Veterans struggle to frame their experience in civilian terms, and most construction HR teams do not know how to read a military resume. That gap is entirely solvable with the right tools, which are provided in the appendices to this report.

How to Build a Program That Works

Start at the Top, Not the Jobsite

The most important structural lesson: Veteran hiring programs cannot be driven at the project level. By the time a workforce partner engages with a project site, the team is already in place. There is no budget headroom, no open roles, and no appetite to onboard someone mid-stream.

Effective programs are built and sold at the enterprise level, with COOs, VPs of HR, and Workforce Development leads who have the authority to commit across multiple projects and measure success over a twelve to twenty-four-month horizon. The project placement is the mechanism. The enterprise relationship is the product.

The Three-Phase Model

Voyage Control's Veteran hiring program provides a practical model built around the enterprise approach:

- **Phase 1 — Placement as Logistics Superintendent**
Veterans with logistics, transportation, or operational planning backgrounds are employed to manage site delivery schedules, contractor coordination, safety support, and digital logistics systems. This role plays directly to their strongest competencies while building construction-specific knowledge.
- **Phase 2 — Technology Training and Mentoring**
Structured training on construction logistics platforms, combined with client co-designed OJT plans, broadens the Veteran's knowledge base across project placements and tracks development against agreed milestones.
- **Phase 3 — Direct Hire Pathway**
At the conclusion of a project engagement, clients can hire the Veteran directly with no recruitment success fee. Low risk entry, long-term value.

Training Program from Industry for Veterans

A phased development program driven and supported by the collective industry leaders in support of Veterans entering the construction industry will materially improve outcomes. A structure that intentionally rotates veterans through document management, risk and safety management, and project management, anchored to real project responsibilities and clear milestones would accelerate integration, build technical credibility, and deliver earlier project value while reducing attrition risk. An example training program might look the following (suggested by a client):

Phase	Focus Area	Duration	Primary Objective	Key Outputs
Phase 0	Orientation & Baseline	2–4 weeks	Rapid construction fluency and alignment with company delivery model	Drawing literacy, systems onboarding, role clarity
Phase 1	Document Management	3–4 months	Build technical credibility through disciplined information control	RFI/submittal ownership, document tracking, decision logs
Phase 2	Risk & EHS Management	3–4 months	Translate military risk discipline into construction safety and operational risk	JHAs, safety walks, risk forecasting, incident tracking
Phase 3	Project Management	4–6 months	Develop future PM / field leadership capability	Cost tracking, scheduling, subcontractor coordination
Phase 4	Capstone & Placement	1–2 months	Demonstrate readiness for permanent role and lock in placement	End-to-end scope ownership, lessons learned, role assignment

Map the Rank to the Role

Veterans should not be treated as interchangeable. A Staff Sergeant who managed a 12-person team and \$2M in equipment in a hostile environment is not an entry-level candidate. Use rank and MOS to set the right entry point:

Military Rank Tier	Construction Entry Point
Junior Enlisted (E1 to E3)	Field Engineer, Equipment Operator, Survey Tech, BIM/VDC Technician, Safety Engineer
NCO (E5 to E6)	Assistant Superintendent, Logistics Coordinator, Project Engineer, Scheduler, Site Safety Manager
Senior NCO (E7 to E9)	Superintendent, Senior Superintendent, Operations Manager
Officer (O3 to O6)	Project Manager, Project Executive, Operations Manager, General Manager

Full Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) code to role mappings by branch are in Appendix C. The Rank-to-Role matrix is in Appendix B.

Do Not Overlook Disabled Veterans or Military Spouses

Veterans

Veterans with service-connected physical disabilities is an overlooked pool of talented and disciplined workforce members. These Veterans might be limited in field work due to safety considerations and regulations, but within the construction management, logistics and supply chain management roles, these Veterans could excel. Additional roles in drone operations, BIM and VDC coordination, remote site monitoring, estimating, and safety compliance are all high-value roles that can be structured to match a disabled Veteran's specific capabilities.

Disability is a design challenge, not a disqualifier.

Military Spouses

Military spouses represent a second largely overlooked talent pool. Based on recent Department of War (DOW) statistics, there are approximately one million military spouses in the global U.S. military community. Military spouses face a roughly 20% unemployment rate, which is four times the national average. This figure has remained statistically unchanged since 2015 according to a 2026 DOW report.

In January 2026, the Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot became a permanent Career Accelerator program, a long-term, fully funded pathway into portable, high-demand careers. Nearly 40% of employed spouses now report having remote work options, and 64% have flexible scheduling. Reasons cited for this high unemployment rate are driven entirely by structural factors such as frequent relocations, credential portability barriers, and resume gaps that civilian employers routinely misread.

Military spouses bring exceptional adaptability, organizational capability, and cultural fluency. They present an exceptional talent pool for, but not limited to, roles in project administration, accounting, HR, marketing, and technology. Roles in the traditional trades that support the construction industry are also roles that some military spouses might choose as well as this

allows for roles that can be transported to new assignment locations addressing the transportability challenge. This is a talent pool of highly qualified candidates who your competitors are not hiring.

The Contracting Angle

Veteran hiring is not just a workforce strategy. It is also a contracting strategy.

The FY2024 National Defense Authorization Act raised the federal government's Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) spending goal from 3% to 5% of all prime and subcontract dollars, a 67% increase in targeted opportunity. In FY2023, federal agencies already reached that level, awarding approximately \$31.9 billion to SDVOSBs. GCs on federal contracts can count subcontract awards to certified SDVOSBs toward their socioeconomic subcontracting goals.

Critically, Veteran focused contracting programs are on more stable legal and political ground than broader MWBE and DBE frameworks, which have faced mounting legal scrutiny since the Supreme Court's 2023 affirmative action ruling. The SDVOSB framework has bipartisan Congressional support and has recently been strengthened, not weakened.

GCs who invest in Veteran hiring today are also seeding the pipeline of qualified SDVOSB subcontractors they will need tomorrow. Veterans who gain skills, credentials, and industry relationships through employment programs are well-positioned to launch their own contracting firms. Note: as of December 22, 2024, only SBA VetCert-certified businesses count toward SDVOSB goals. Self-certification is no longer accepted.

Seven Things to Do Now

- **Build a translation framework** - Train HR and operations staff to read military resumes using the MOS to role mappings in Appendix C and the task translation table in Appendix A. Without this foundation, every other step fails.
- **Engage at the Enterprise Level** - Assign a Workforce Development lead or COO level sponsor to own the Veteran hiring program. Do not delegate this to individual project teams.
- **Start with logistics** - The logistics superintendent role is the ideal entry point. It maps directly to Veteran competencies and provides a structured environment to build construction-specific knowledge.
- **Build mentoring from day one** - Pair every incoming Veteran with an experienced superintendent or project manager. Check in regularly during the first twelve months. Veterans who find the right fit tend to stay for the long term. This could potentially mirror the current very successful ACE Mentor Program of America.
- **Show them the path** - Communicate clearly what a construction career looks like ten years out. Uncertainty about the future is a leading cause of early attrition.

- **Explore the SDVOSB angle** - If your firm has federal contracting obligations, engage your legal and procurement teams on how a Veteran hiring program can be structured to support SDVOSB subcontracting goals.
- **Track and refine** - Measure Veteran retention, promotion rates, and performance against non-Veteran hires. Build the evidence base and improve the program over time.

Conclusion

The construction industry's workforce problem and the Veteran community's transition challenge are mirror images of each other. One has exactly what the other needs. The barrier between them is not insurmountable. It is a translation problem and a structural commitment problem, and both are within your control to fix.

The over 200,000 service members who leave the military every year are not waiting for the construction industry to figure this out. They are finding other careers. The companies that act now will have a meaningful and durable talent advantage. The ones that wait will be explaining to their boards why the workforce gap keeps growing.

The appendices that follow contain the detailed reference tools needed to put this framework into practice: military task to construction task translation, rank to role mapping, MOS to career equivalents by branch, and a full construction career path framework.

Appendix A: Military Task to Construction Task Translation

Use when reviewing Veteran resumes, conducting interviews, or designing onboarding programs.

Military Task / Skill	Construction Equivalent
Small unit leadership (team leader, squad leader, platoon sergeant)	Crew foreman, Superintendent
Pre-combat / equipment inspections	Pre-task planning, equipment inspections, QA/QC, PPE compliance
Military logistics (water, ammunition, fuel)	Material deliveries, delivery logs, equipment tracking
Situational awareness	Safety, risk management, toolbox talks
Planning with maps, terrain models, and mission overlays	Reading drawings, BIM, 4D sequencing
Weapon and equipment maintenance	Tool and equipment maintenance
Coordinating combined arms movements	Subcontractor coordination, Pull Planning, Lean practices
After Action Reviews (AARs)	Post task reviews/lessons learned
Mission briefs / Operations Orders (OPORDs)	Daily reports, progress tracking, project scope & execution plan
Checkpoint, asset, or Basecamp security	Jobsite security
Compliance frameworks	Building codes, environmental compliance, and safety
Convoy operations	Equipment staging, routing site traffic, and coordinating equipment transport
Emergency response	First aid response/incident management
Hand and arm signals	Safety, directing equipment operators
Mission execution under deadlines	Meeting construction schedules
Operating in austere environments	Managing difficult job-site conditions
Training soldiers	Workforce training & apprenticeship development
Performance evaluations	Employee performance reviews
Budget oversight/resource allocation	Project cost management, labor & material allocation
Situation Reports (SITREPs)	Project status reports
Command briefings	Client/stakeholder updates

Appendix B: Rank to Role Matrix

Starting points, not ceilings. Veterans with engineering, logistics, or leadership MOS backgrounds may qualify for more senior roles.

Construction Role	Junior Enlisted (E1 to E3)	NCO (E5 to E6)	Senior NCO (E7 to E9)	Officer
Field Engineer	E1 to E3			
Equipment Operator	E1 to E3			
Survey Technician	E1 to E3			
Site Safety Engineer	E1 to E3			
BIM/VDC Technician	E1 to E3			
Quality Engineer	E1 to E3			
Assistant Superintendent		E5 to E6		
Logistics Coordinator		E5 to E6		
Project Engineer		E5 to E6		
Scheduler		E5 to E6		
Site Safety Manager		E5 to E6		
Superintendent		E5 to E6	E7 to E9	
Senior Superintendent			E7 to E9	
Project Manager				O3 to O4
Project Executive				O5 to O6
Operations Manager		E9	E9	O5 to O6

Appendix C: MOS to Construction Career Equivalents

Starting points. Individual candidates may qualify for more senior roles based on additional training and experience.

U.S. Army

MOS / Military Role	Construction Career Equivalent
12B: Combat Engineer	Site Development Supervisor / Heavy Civil Construction
12C: Bridge Crewmember	Bridge Construction / Infrastructure Projects
12H: Construction Engineering Supervisor	Construction Superintendent
12K: Plumber	Commercial / Residential Plumbing Contractor
12N: Horizontal Construction Engineer	Heavy Equipment Operator
12R: Interior Electrician	Electrical Contractor / Electrician
12T: Technical Engineer	Construction Project Engineer
12W: Carpentry and Masonry Specialist	Carpenter / Mason
12Y: Geospatial Engineer	Surveyor / Site Planning Specialist
91B: Wheeled Vehicle Mechanic	Equipment Maintenance Manager

U.S. Marine Corps

MOS / Military Role	Construction Equivalent
1341: Engineer Equipment Mechanic	Construction Equipment Mechanic
1345: Engineer Equipment Operator	Heavy Equipment Operator
1371: Combat Engineer	Civil Construction / Demolition / Site Prep
1141: Electrician	Electrical Contractor
1161: Refrigeration Mechanic	HVAC Technician
1171: Water Support Technician	Utility Infrastructure / Water Systems

U.S. Navy (Construction Battalions “Seabees”)

Seabee ratings map almost directly to civilian construction trades. If you are not recruiting from Seabee networks, start today.

Rating / Military Role	Construction Equivalent
BU: Builder	Carpenter / General Contractor
CE: Construction Electrician	Electrician
CM: Construction Mechanic	Equipment Mechanic
EA: Engineering Aid	Surveyor / Construction Estimator
EO: Equipment Operator	Heavy Equipment Operator
SW: Steelworker	Structural Steel Worker / Ironworker
UT: Utilitiesman	Plumbing / Utilities Contractor

U.S. Air Force

AFSC / Military Role	Construction Equivalent
3E2X1: Pavements & Construction Equipment	Road Construction / Heavy Equipment
3E3X1: Structural Specialist	Carpenter / Concrete / Structural
3E4X1: Water & Fuel Systems	Plumbing / Utility Systems
3E0X1: Electrical Systems	Electrician
3E1X1: HVAC	HVAC Technician
3E5X1: Engineering	Construction Project Engineer

Military Leadership to Construction Management

Military Role	Construction Management Role
Squad Leader	Crew Foreman
Platoon Sergeant	Site Superintendent
First Sergeant	Operations Manager
Company Commander	Construction Project Manager

Appendix D: Construction Career Path Framework

Inspired by a representative industry career pathway matrix (2026). Pathways are designed to be flexible and interconnected, supporting advancement into leadership roles in both operational and professional contexts.

Career Track	Description	Preferred Education	Career Path
Project Management	Oversight of budget and schedule for construction management process.	Construction Management; Engineering	Project Engineer → Project Manager → Project Executive → Account Manager → General Manager
Field Supervision	Day-to-day site operations: subcontractor workforce, schedule, EHS goals.	Trade School; Engineering; Construction Management	Field Engineer → Superintendent → Senior Superintendent → Operations Manager → General Manager
Skilled Trade	Hands-on skilled labor across construction trades.	Trade School	Craft Person → Foreman → Superintendent
Safety	Training and achievement of EHS program goals.	Safety; Construction; OSHA Certifications	Safety Manager → EHS Leadership
Preconstruction	Risk assessment and project cost estimating.	Construction Management; Engineering	Estimator → Senior Estimator → Chief Estimator / Preconstruction Manager
Virtual Design & Construction (VDC)	3D/4D modeling, clash detection, digital construction planning.	CAD; Architecture; Engineering; Graphic Design	VDC Technician → VDC Manager → Director of VDC
Subcontractor Engagement	Inclusive contracting and diverse business community support.	Inclusion: Business Administration	Coordinator → Subcontractor Engagement Manager
Business Development	Client relationship building and business growth.	Business; Sales & Marketing	BD Coordinator → BD Manager → Director of BD
Accounting / Finance	Project budget tracking and payments.	Accounting; Finance	Accountant → Controller → CFO
Information Technology	Business technology platforms and infrastructure.	IT; Computer Science; Cybersecurity	IT Analyst → IT Manager → CIO/CTO
Human Resources	Recruiting, hiring, training, employee development.	HR; Psychology; Communication	HR Generalist → HR Manager → CHRO
Marketing	Proposal responses and company communications.	Business; Marketing; Communications	Marketing Coordinator → Marketing Manager → Director of Marketing
Legal	Contracts and company legal protection.	Law	Legal Counsel → General Counsel
Administrative	Office and jobsite daily operational support.	Administration; Communication; GED	Coordinator → Administrative Manager

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