Pandemic pivot: Virtual fairs help veterans land jobs

DAV sees an influx of participants in virtual job fairs as much of the nation remains in isolation

While fears of layoffs and the spike in unemployment have been daily headlines as the nation responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies are still actively looking to hire veterans.

The need to practice safe social distancing measures can make this a challenging time for employers, but DAV has experienced an increase in attendance at its recent virtual job fairs. Recently, over 1,200 individuals took part in a DAV co-sponsored job fair where more than 50 employers were represented. The number of participants was a new all-time high for the virtual event, marking an attendance increase of nearly 40% when compared to national online job fairs over the last two years.

The COVID-19 outbreak has forced employers and job seekers alike into new territory, but adaptability has always been one of the hallmarks of a veteran—something that makes them particularly attractive to companies.

“People are hiring and they want veterans on their teams. We’ve seen where start dates may be adjusted and other processes are different, but we have veterans who are being onboarded and advancing their careers,” said DAV National Employment Director Jeff Hall. “It’s a strange time and
unemployment is surging, but there are opportunities and veterans need to aggressively pursue them to help our nation rebuild.”

Mike Francomb, an Army veteran and chief technology officer for RecruitMilitary, the DAV partner who facilitates events, said most job seekers have found the virtual hiring events to be just as engaging and interactive as the in-person events.

“Several formats are available for meeting employers,” Francomb said. “Including large groups, small groups and one-on-one discussions or interviews.”

“Whether you’ve lost your job because of the pandemic, are transitioning out of the military, or looking for a new career, it can bring a lot of anxiety in an already anxious time. But our events are seeing an uptick online for sure,” said Hall. “We can’t predict how long it will take for our economy to recover. But we know that veterans have a zero percent chance of landing any opportunity that they don’t pursue.”

Hall said many virtual hiring events held in the wake of the pandemic have experienced an increase in attendance over in-person career fairs the previous year.

All previously scheduled traditional career fairs will be held virtually through at least the end of July.

In addition to increased online participation, Hall said more veterans are seeking DAV’s assistance with benefits. “I suppose it’s inevitable that veterans who’ve put off filing a claim – particularly those who have lost employment – see the value in our core advocacy services and we welcome the opportunity to help them. Now is as good a time as any to ensure you’re getting the support you receive for your sacrifices in the military.”

From June 2014 through December 2019, DAV sponsored 607
traditional and virtual career fairs that nearly 210,000 active service members, Guard and Reserve personnel, veterans and spouses attended, resulting in more than 146,000 job offers. Many attendees from DAV’s virtual job fairs have seen nearly instant responses from employers.

“I received an interview the same day,” said Indira Green, who attended a recent hiring event.

And with so many Americans currently required to stay home by state and local guidance, the importance of technology and flexibility have become even more critical for those looking for a job or a new career.

“One of the positive things was that I did not have to waste my gas or my time going in person,” said veteran Michele King.

“We know that unemployment is looming for many Americans,” Francomb said. “It’s our mission to ensure that the veteran population is minimally impacted by that trend. We have employers ready to hire, we have industries that need to increase the workforce and we’re actively working to make that happen through our virtual events and digital resources.”

For more information on DAV’s career fairs and a complete listing of future events, please visit jobs.dav.org.