



# Laboratory helps veterans seeking employment

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Los Alamos National Laboratory is removing barriers that veterans face in finding employment, not only at the Lab, but also with other employers across New Mexico. The Laboratory recently partnered with the state to look at how companies can rethink how they recruit, hire, and retain veterans and—by extension—tap into the skills veterans have obtained during their valuable military service to our country.

Even the Laboratory, which has a history and mission tied to serving the nation, has found that recruiting veterans requires some extra work.

After working closely with the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions since 2012 to strengthen the Lab's connections with the veteran community and develop best practices for hiring veterans, the Lab wanted to do something to help other employers and veterans.

A year ago, C.J. Bacino, the Lab's diversity officer, presented the idea of a training summit for employers to Workforce Solutions Secretary Celina Bussey. The idea took off and grew into a multi-event campaign for employers, veterans, and the families of veterans.

The first event—Hire Veterans: Employers Hiring Veterans, Transitioning Service Members and Family—was held on September 29 in Santa Fe. The event drew 115 people from companies, local government, and state agencies for training and open discussions about how to recruit, hire, and retain veterans.

The Laboratory was a sponsor of the state's first Hire Veterans training summit for employers. Lab diversity officer C.J. Bacino (fourth from left) moderated a panel discussion with veterans, including Los Alamos's Cody Nevala-Amraen (far left). The other panelists were employed with other organizations.

"I got nothing but positive feedback about it," Bacino says.

The New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions and the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services hosted the summit with a coalition of sponsors, including Los Alamos and Sandia national laboratories, Lockheed Martin, New Mexico National Guard, Los Alamos Commerce and Development Corporation, the Society for Human Resource Management New Mexico, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the City of Santa Fe.

At the summit, Bacino moderated a panel discussion with veterans about their experiences transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce. Cody Nevala-Amraen, the Lab's lead veteran recruiter and a recruiting coordinator in Diversity and Strategic Staffing, was part of the panel and integral in planning the summit.

"When leaving the military, there's this void for many veterans that is sometimes very difficult to fill," says Nevala-Amraen, a U.S. Marine who served in Iraq. He said he found what he was looking for in the Lab's mission, which unifies the workforce with a common goal.

The next event will be a statewide job fair for veterans, transitioning service members, and their families, to be held November 17 in Albuquerque.

"By connecting more veterans, service members, and their families with more businesses and career opportunities, we'll be able to help more of those who've served our state and country participate in New Mexico's growing and diversifying workforce—while at the same time helping more companies meet their needs for highly skilled and well-trained workers," Bussey and Veterans Services Secretary Jack Fox said in a news release.

As recently as 2010, the unemployment rate for New Mexico's veterans spiked at 8.8 percent. Today, it's down to 5.5 percent, but that still leaves New Mexico with a ranking of 41<sup>st</sup> in the nation.

Fortunately, the strength behind this campaign is enormous and might be a catalyst for more progress.

"Los Alamos National Laboratory values its veterans and is proud to support events like these that allow employers to share best practices regarding the hiring and retention of veterans," says Human Resources Division Leader Sue Harris.

The Laboratory has a vested interest in recruiting veterans, given its national security mission. According to this year's latest figures, veterans make up 9.4 percent of the Lab's total employee population. That's about 1,000 veterans, including students and craft workers.

Striving to do even better, the Lab has tracked the effectiveness of its efforts and tried new approaches, all of which were shared at the summit. Besides having a linkage agreement with the state and a veterans recruiting coordinator, the Lab has a Veterans Employee Resource Group that offers mentoring to new hires. The Lab participates in the Wounded Warriors Project and the Service Academies Research Associates (SARA) Program and sends recruiters to Military Officers Job Opportunities (MOJO) job fairs.