

Military  
Transition  
Workforce  
Development  
Study

2010



CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS

## Situation Summary

In December 2008 representatives from the City of Virginia Beach Development Authority (VBDA) and Regent University held an introductory meeting to discuss workforce development trends related to the transitioning military community in Hampton Roads. As a subject of mutual interest, VBDA sought to identify workforce strategies to help retain transitioning military in the area while Regent sought to determine the education needs and interests of this population, particularly with the arrival of their new Director of Military Affairs.

While several initial strategies were discussed, it was apparent that additional data would be needed to support or justify any recommended strategy or economic investment. Available data, such as a previous study conducted by VBDA found that nearly 9,400 transitioning military personnel had skill sets that mapped to specific industries within Hampton Roads employers.<sup>1</sup> Other efforts to survey or research the transitioning military population in Hampton Roads did not yield a desired sample size to generalize the results. To that end, during these discussions it was determined that a critical step to developing a comprehensive workforce development strategy for transitioning military personnel in Hampton Roads, was to answer key questions about this population involving future residency, education and employment.

Therefore, Regent University recommended its Center for Effective Organizations to conduct an initial study that would provide useful data to VBDA and area stakeholders such as employers, colleges and universities—data that could then be used for strategic economic and workforce development purposes.

Enclosed within this summary are the key findings of the study as well as a review of effective practices and implications.

The principal investigators of this study would like to thank the City of Virginia Beach Development Authority, the Military Economic Development Advisory Committee and the Fleet and Family Support Centers for their insight and guidance. More importantly, we would like to acknowledge and thank the extraordinary men and women who serve and willingly participated in this study.

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<sup>1</sup> City of Virginia Beach Development Authority

## Research Design

The purpose of this study is to provide supporting data that will help answer these key research questions:

- What percentage of transitioning military choose to remain in Hampton Roads; and if so, why?
- What are the reasons that transitioning military choose not to remain in Hampton Roads?
- What are the workforce development (i.e., employment and education) needs of the transitioning military in Hampton Roads?
- How do employers in Hampton Roads view transitioning military as prospective talent for their workforce?

To answer these key questions and add perspective to the findings, a mixed methods approach was employed, which included both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study included a sample of (n=334) Navy transitioning military personnel.

Surveys were administered to three groups of transitioning personnel attending Transition Assistance Program classes at Naval Station Norfolk in August through October 2009. The majority of survey responses reflect personnel at grade E1-E6, with a small percentage (<.03) at E7-E9 and O1-O3. Results from the survey were electronically entered, checked for accuracy and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

In addition to the survey, hiring managers and human resource professionals from a range of area employers including BAE Systems, Cintas, Don Richard Associates, Booz Allen Hamilton, Deloitte Consulting and Robert Half Staffing were interviewed or provided comment about desirable competencies and organizational fit regarding transitioning personnel as prospective employees. However, it should be noted that the sample of qualitative responses from interviews or comments does not render a summary perspective that can be generalized or applied to all employers in the Hampton Roads area. Therefore, the findings from interviews and comments are used to provide a dimension to further understand transitioning military workforce development needs.

Finally, to provide additional perspective to the entirety of this study, a brief review of existing research and effective practices were identified and summarized within this report.

## Participant Demographics

Among the survey respondents, the majority (37 percent) reside in Virginia Beach while 26 percent live in Norfolk, followed by 18 percent living in Hampton and Newport News with the remaining respondents residing in the surrounding areas (see Figure 1). Survey respondents were mostly male (77 percent) with 23 percent female (see Figure 2). A majority of participants were under 30 years old (77 percent), followed by 15 percent between ages 30-34 years; and 8 percent between 35-44 years (see Figure 3).

## Summary of Results

- Participants consider their primary competency area in security or law enforcement (15 percent), followed by electrical trade work (14 percent), engineering (13 percent), management (11 percent), human resources management (10 percent), and communication technologies (9 percent). Among the *Other* category, the majority of written responses are in aviation, public safety/firefighting and hospitality or food services (see Figure 4).
- Among survey participants the majority (46 percent) desire to be in professional or trade positions after transitioning from the military. Some 31 percent look to be in management roles while 11 percent look to own or operate their own business as entrepreneurs. Among the *Other* category, the majority of written responses are bio/medical technical roles or law enforcement (see Figure 5).
- Furthermore, when asked about desired employment areas, participants specify health services and medical (17 percent), engineering (13 percent), security and law enforcement (12 percent), federal government (12 percent), IT or communication technologies (8 percent), education (7 percent), business services (6 percent), electrical work (6 percent) and state or local government (6 percent). Among the *Other* category, repeated responses include law, transportation or aviation, energy, media and pastoral or religious services (see Figure 6).
- Regarding future education or academic intentions, 98 percent of participants indicate they will seek additional academic or continuing education with 66 percent seeking a bachelor's degree, 24 percent seeking a master's degree, 11 percent seeking an associate's degree, 8 percent seeking continuing education or certifications and 5 percent seeking doctoral degrees (see Figure 7).
- Among the academic areas of interest engineering is the most considered (21 percent) followed by bio/medical (18 percent), criminal justice (13 percent), information technology (11 percent), homeland security (9 percent), education (7 percent), entrepreneurship/innovation (6 percent), global business (5 percent), government or public administration (5 percent) and law (5 percent). Among the *Other* category, repeated responses include transportation, aviation and general business (see Figure 8).

### Summary of Results (cont.)

- Finally, when participants are asked if they intend to stay in Hampton Roads after transitioning from the military, 62 percent indicate “No”, while 38 percent indicate “Yes” (see Figure 9).
- When asked the reasons for an intention to leave Hampton Roads, 63 percent of participants cite that Hampton Roads is not a desirable location, 32 percent indicate they want to leave the military/veteran community environment, while 14 percent indicate there is not much cultural or social life and 10 percent noted there are not many employment opportunities. Among responses in the *Other* category, there are repeated responses indicating they want to move to be closer to family, want to move for their children or that they do not favor the Hampton Roads traffic (see Figure 10).
- Among those who favor staying in the Hampton Roads area after transition, the highest category is *Other* at 36 percent, with nearly all of those respondents indicating they desire to stay because of family or personal ties to the area (e.g., spouse stationed here, children in school, spouse working here, spouse going to school here, or own a home/cannot sell a home).
- Some 35 percent of participants indicate they intend to remain in Hampton Roads because of employment opportunities, followed by 33 percent who say Hampton Roads is a desirable location, 27 percent indicate the military/veteran community, 27 percent cite the educational opportunities, while 18 percent note the cultural and social life (see Figure 11).
- Among the human resource professionals and hiring manager observations, there is a strong, expressed commitment to consider transitioning military/veteran prospective hires. Among the majority of them, an immediate family member (e.g., spouse, child or parent) is serving or has previously served in the Navy or other military branches.
- Human resource professionals and hiring managers cite the strongest qualities and competencies of transitioning military include (a) dependability, (b) commitment or loyalty to the organization, (c) personal work ethic, (d) personal values/character and (e) high technical proficiency/ability, particularly in areas of technology, security, intelligence, mechanics and engineering.
- Human resource professionals and hiring managers indicate a willingness to coach or manage expectations when reviewing transitioning military résumés or interviewing candidates (i.e., if the résumé is not *translated* into civilian competencies or skill sets, they are experienced and/or willing to work with the candidate to talk through how their skills might apply in the civilian workforce).
- While there is an acknowledgement of improved interviewing skills and résumé writing among transitioning personnel than in previous years, human resource professionals recommend this area continue to be a focus in TAP classes, particularly behavioral-based interviewing.

## Summary of Results (cont.)

- The 2003 Military Transition Demonstration Project by the Department of Labor and Department of Defense reviewed two military transition programs based in Hampton Roads and San Diego. Among the findings, one overarching conclusion by the review committee was that while both programs were useful in providing meaningful service to the transitioning personnel, the Norfolk site efforts represented “complex, multi-layered and independently functioning groups.”<sup>2</sup> The notable difference in effectiveness and potential for the San Diego program was the “seamless unity of partner entities, military and civilian.”<sup>3</sup>
- Other findings from the demonstration project indicate that participants in the transition programs from both sites were generally able to find or be placed in positions with progressive and financially-rewarded career paths. This financial stability also contributes to military couples’ positive views toward re-enlisting or being deployed. The project also found that organization leaders utilized the program as an untapped source to staff local economic development projects and that integration with municipal economic development boards, employers and education providers greatly enhances the effectiveness and utility of the programs.
- Finally, in November 2009 two military transition projects were honored by the Society for Human Resource Management at a national level. One, based in New Jersey, was developed with area partners and Ft. Dix to help returning Iraq war veterans translate their military training and experience into the language of civilian recruiters. The other program, *Seamless Transition*, offers career counseling and connects employers and transitioning military through referrals and job postings. In addition, the program works with employers to list any required certifications for specific jobs, which enables the military to work with education partners to provide opportunities for personnel to obtain the certifications.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 2003 Department of Labor Military Transition Demonstration Project

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ere.net <http://www.ere.net/2009/11/30/two-military-transition-programs-honored-by-shrm/>

Figure 1

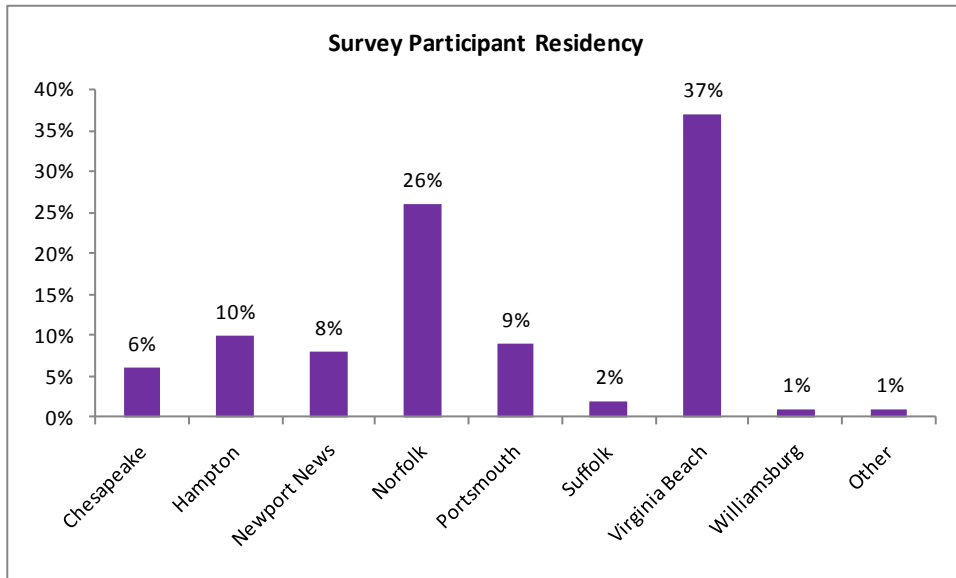


Figure 2

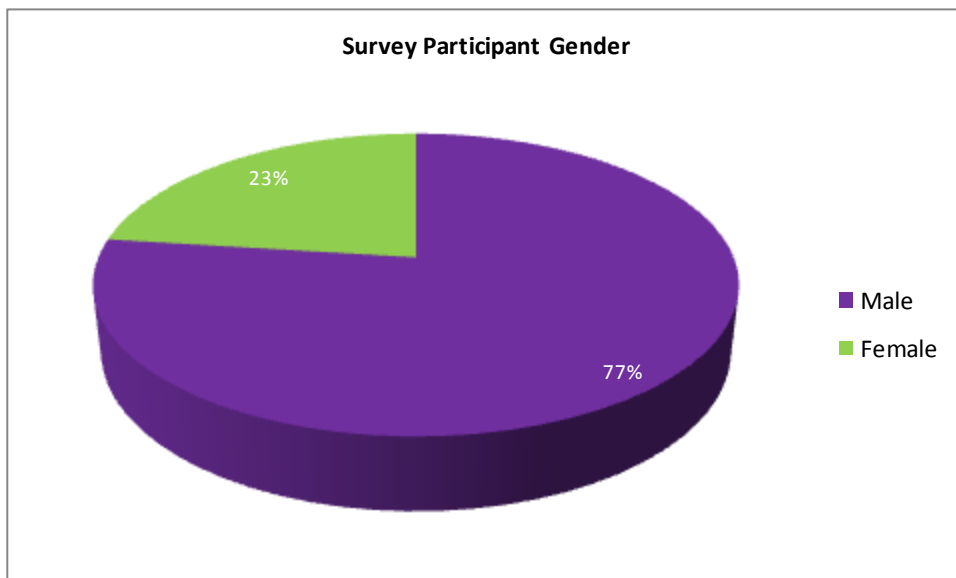


Figure 3

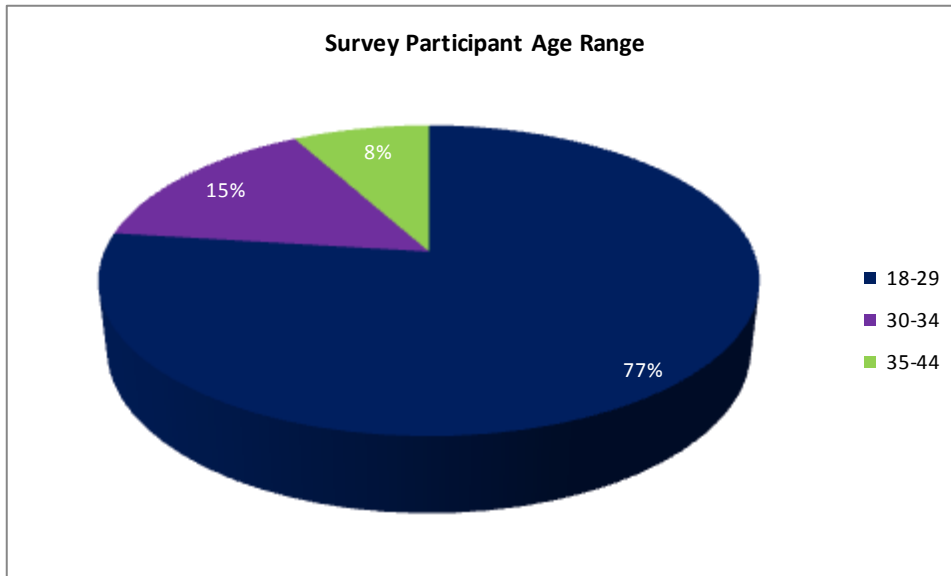


Figure 4

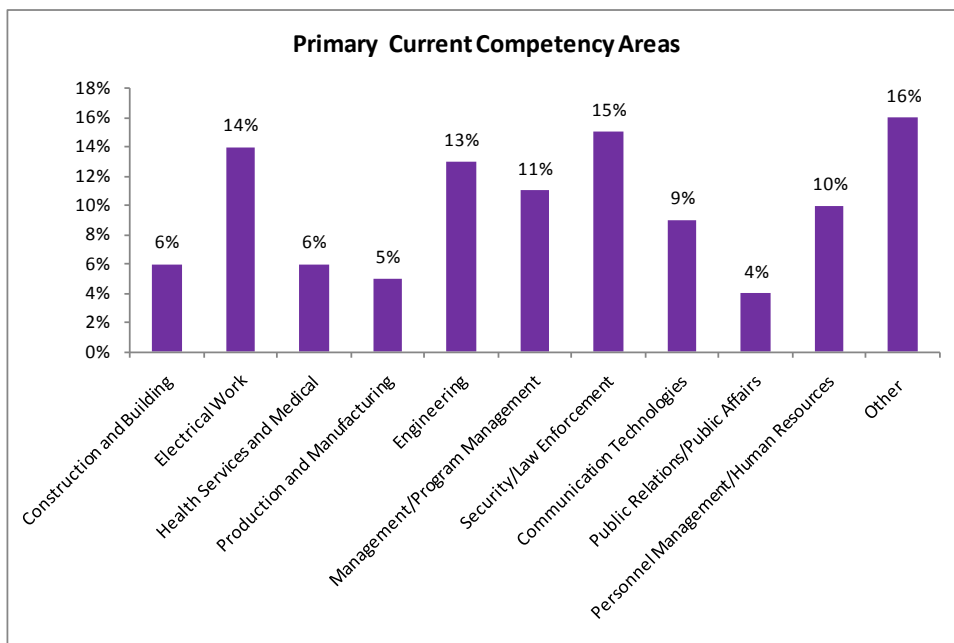


Figure 5

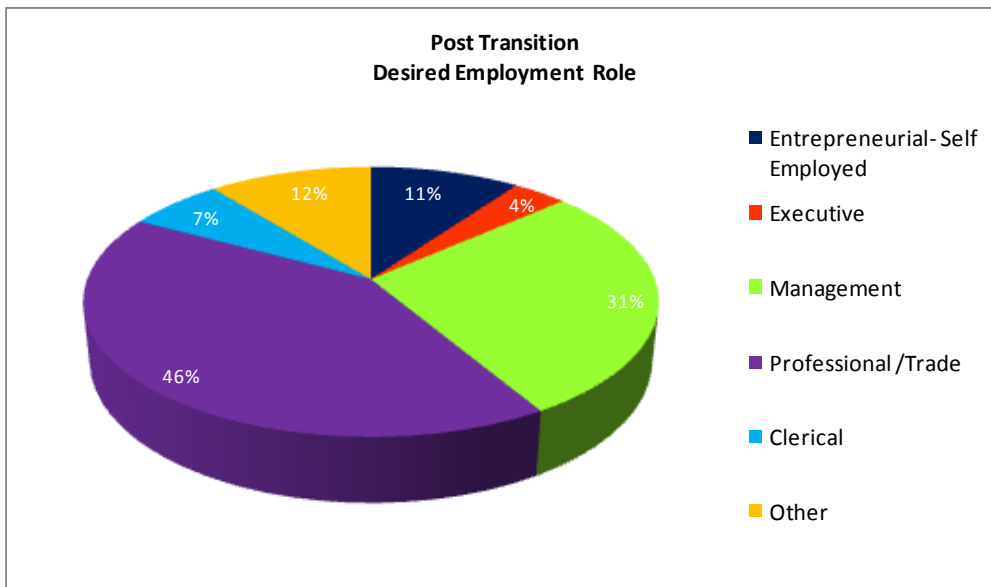


Figure 6

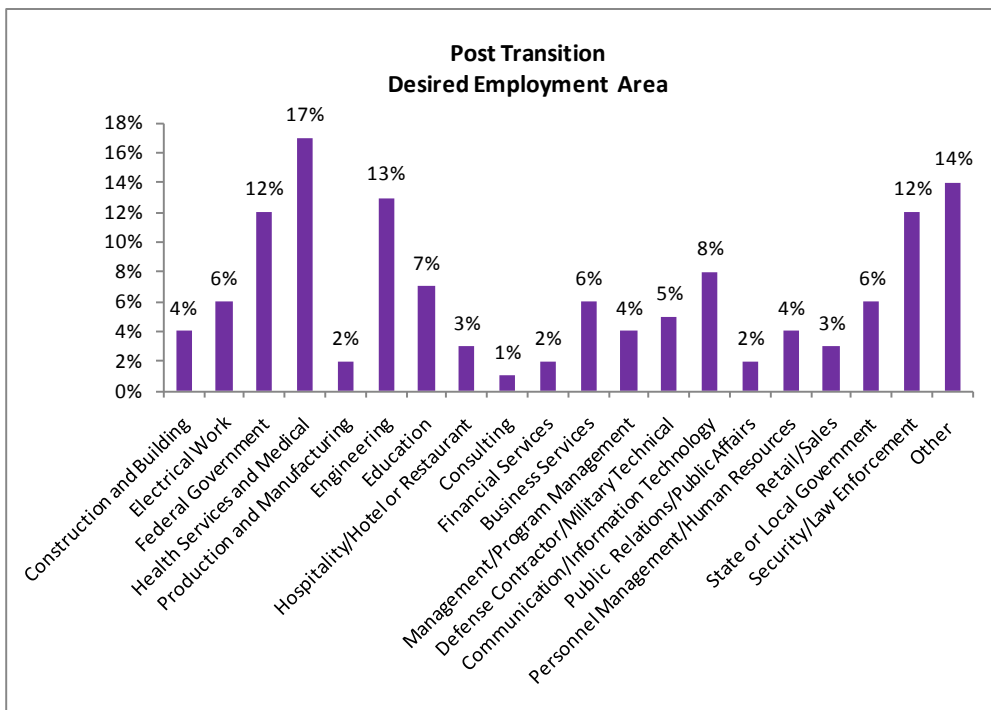


Figure 7

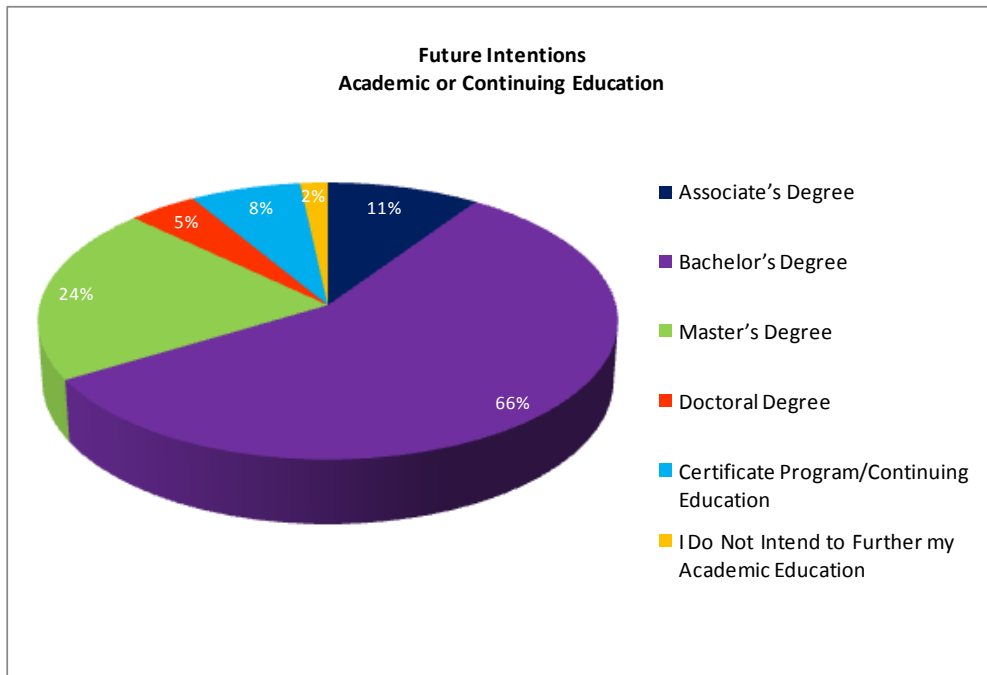


Figure 8

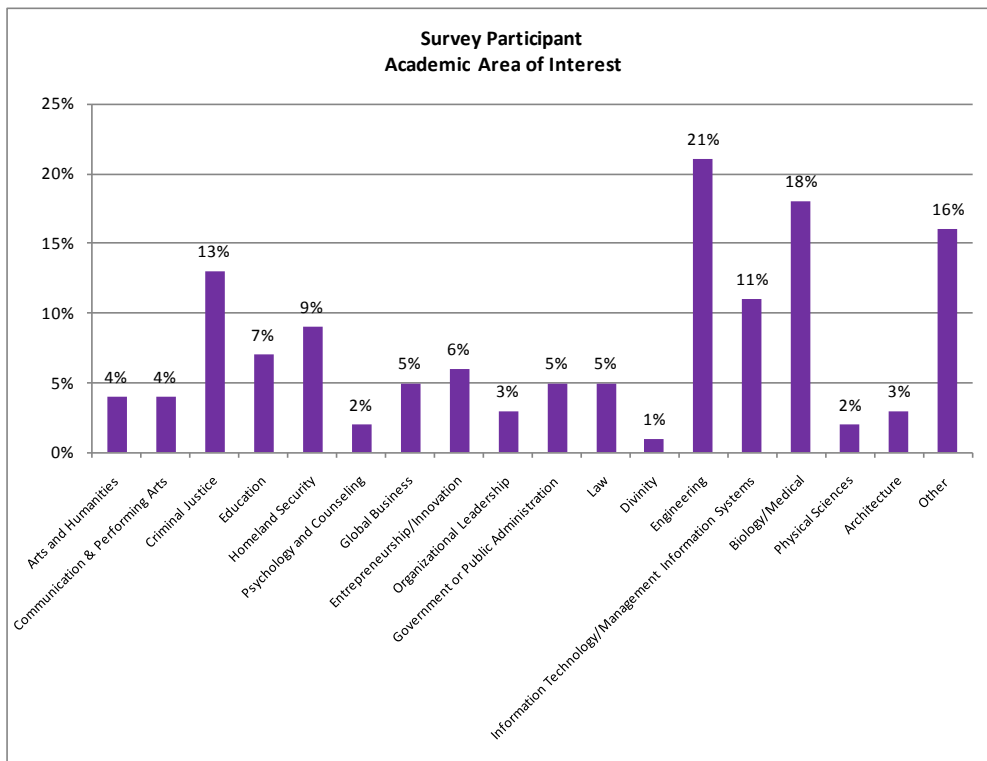


Figure 9

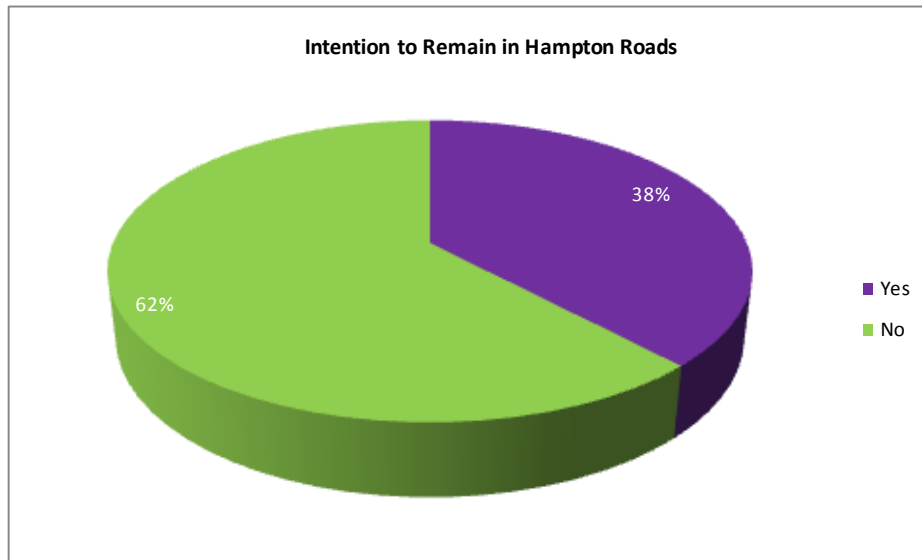


Figure 10

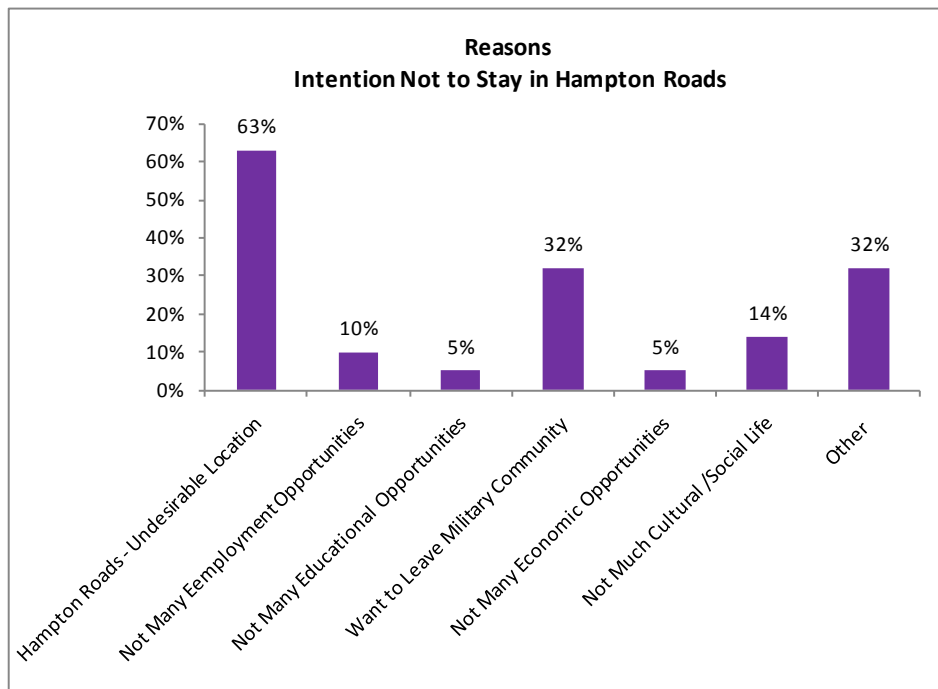
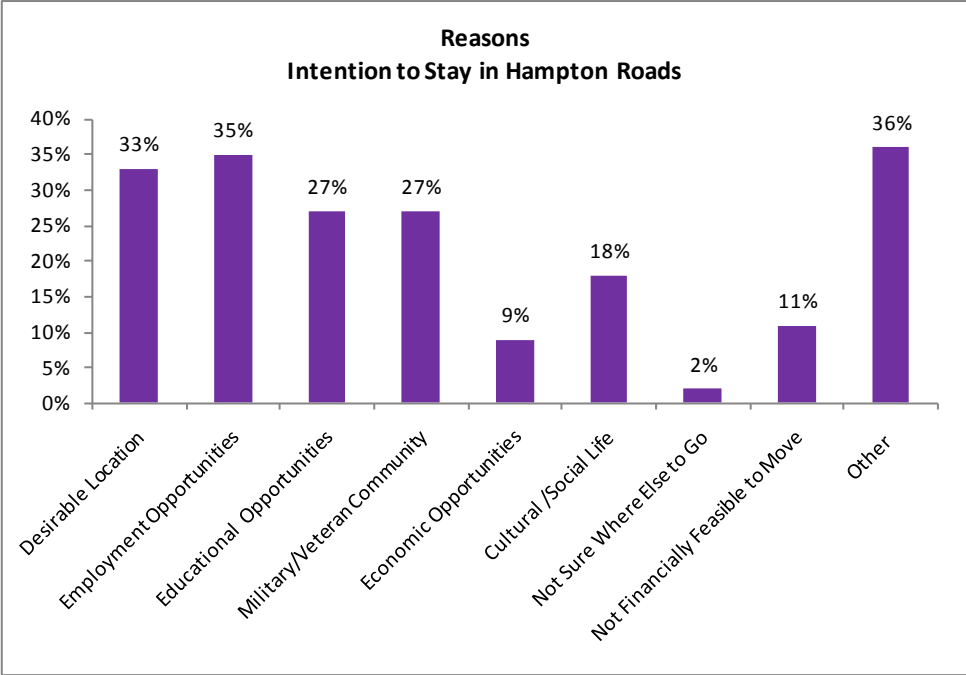


Figure 11



## Implications of the Results

In terms of workforce development, the survey results provide support that current and future desired employment areas of transitioning employees align with industries and employers within the Hampton Roads area. The observations from human resource professionals and hiring managers also support a favorable view toward hiring transitioning military, even coaching and advising them to help translate their skills to convey to civilian employers. This provides some indication for consideration that in addition to federally designated national business partners, there is a vested interest among regional employers to partner with military transition support services to ensure the success of this population.

Furthermore, the range of education providers in Hampton Roads that are designated as Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC), create ample opportunities for the 98 percent of respondents who indicate a desire to continue their education. In addition, among the many reasons for which a majority of participants indicate they intend not to remain in Hampton Roads, are the very reasons 38 percent of participants intend to stay. What is particularly revealing among respondents who intend to stay is the strong correlation with personal or family ties to the area.

Finally, perhaps a more revealing implication from the study and additional research is the need for meaningful partnerships among employers, local government economic development and workforce development offices, education providers and of course, the military community.

The very reasons cited as limiting the growth and impact of military transition success in a previous demonstration project (independent and multi-layered groups or efforts), may still be in effect today. In other words, **partnerships and integration** are a critical component to any workforce development strategy for the transitioning military community. With a significant number of transitioning military residing in the Virginia Beach area and existing, dedicated economic and workforce development functions along with military advisory functions with strong ties to the community, Virginia Beach Development Authority stands in a central position to help lead an integrated partnership model and strategy for military workforce development.

**Figure 12: Partnership Model for Transitioning Military Workforce Development**





The Center for Effective Organizations  
Regent University  
School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship  
1333 Regent University Drive  
Virginia Beach, VA 23464  
USA

Website: [regent.edu/ceo](http://regent.edu/ceo)  
Email: [thecenter@regent.edu](mailto:thecenter@regent.edu)  
Phone: +1 757.352.4074