

Comprehensive Step-by-Step Guide to Utilizing the SkillBridge Program for Veterans

The **SkillBridge** program offers transitioning service members an excellent opportunity to gain valuable civilian work experience through industry training, apprenticeships, or internships during the final 180 days of service. This guide will walk you through the process to effectively utilize the SkillBridge program and maximize its benefits.

Step 1: Understand the Program Eligibility

Before diving into the application process, make sure you meet the basic eligibility requirements:

- **Active Duty Status:** You must be within **180 days of your separation date** (ETS, EAOS, or retirement).
- **Command Approval:** Your unit commander needs to approve your participation.
- **Intent to Transition:** You must be committed to separating from the military at the end of the program.
- **Good Standing:** No pending disciplinary actions that could affect your discharge status.

Step 2: Research Available Opportunities

The SkillBridge program partners with civilian companies offering internships and job training in various industries, ranging from IT and cybersecurity to logistics and healthcare. Follow these steps to research the best opportunities:

- **Visit the SkillBridge Website:** Go to the official SkillBridge portal: SkillBridge Program.
 - Navigate through the **Participating Partners** section, where you can explore companies that offer internships aligned with your career goals.
- **Consult with Transition Assistance Program (TAP):** Your installation's TAP office can help you identify opportunities and provide additional resources on SkillBridge.
- **Contact Employers:** If you have a specific company or career path in mind that isn't already a SkillBridge partner, contact that employer directly. You can request they become a **SkillBridge partner** by applying for a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** through the SkillBridge website.

Step 3: Secure Command Approval

Command approval is critical to participating in the program. Here's how to approach it:

- **Prepare Your Case:** You need to explain how the SkillBridge internship will contribute to your career transition while maintaining your unit's readiness. Ensure you articulate the benefits clearly.

- **Present to Your Chain of Command:** Work through your immediate supervisors up to your commander. Be ready to show:
 - Your separation timeline (within 180 days).
 - Details of the training program you wish to join.
 - Assurance that participating won't interfere with mission-essential tasks.
- **Submit a Formal Request:** Some branches require specific forms or formats for approval. Check with your administrative section (S1, personnel office) to ensure all paperwork is completed correctly.

Step 4: Apply for a SkillBridge Program

Once you've obtained approval from your command and identified the right program, it's time to apply. Follow these steps:

- 1 **Complete Application:** Each company may have its own application process, which often includes submitting a resume and cover letter tailored to their SkillBridge program.
- 2 **Interview (If Required):** Some companies conduct interviews to ensure a good fit. Prepare for this like any other job interview—highlight your military experience and how it translates to the role.
- 3 **Get Accepted:** Upon acceptance, coordinate with the company and your command to set your start and end dates.

Step 5: Coordinate Logistics

SkillBridge allows for up to 180 days of training. During this period, you will still receive **full military pay and benefits**, but there are logistics to consider:

- **Duty Status:** While participating in SkillBridge, you are technically still on active duty but fulfilling training obligations for your civilian role.
- **Housing and Travel:** You may need to relocate or travel depending on the internship's location. Confirm details with both your command and the employer.
 - **Travel Authorization:** Some commands may allow permissive Temporary Duty (TDY) for SkillBridge, while others may require leave or personal arrangements.

Step 6: Complete Your Training

During your time in the SkillBridge program, immerse yourself fully in the training, make professional connections, and learn as much as possible. Keep the following tips in mind:

- **Network:** Use this time to build relationships with professionals in the field.
- **Demonstrate Initiative:** Treat the training like a full-time job; be punctual, show effort, and contribute meaningfully to the company.

- **Seek Feedback:** Ask for feedback from supervisors to ensure you're growing and maximizing the learning experience.

Step 7: Transition to Civilian Employment

Upon completing the program, many SkillBridge participants are offered full-time positions with the same company. Regardless, follow these steps to complete your transition:

- **Finalize Your Transition Plan:** Ensure your TAP documentation and your **DD-214** are in order. Follow up on any VA claims or post-service benefits.
- **Update Your Resume:** Add your SkillBridge experience to your resume. Highlight the skills learned, projects completed, and any relevant metrics that demonstrate your impact.
- **Apply for Jobs (if necessary):** If you don't secure employment through SkillBridge, use the experience to enhance your job search. Many employers value the experience gained through SkillBridge.
- **Stay in Touch:** Maintain contact with your SkillBridge supervisors and colleagues, as they can provide valuable references or networking opportunities for future jobs.

Benefits of SkillBridge

- **Smooth Transition to Civilian Life:** SkillBridge allows you to gain real-world experience while still receiving full military pay and benefits.
- **Cost Savings:** You can complete job training without incurring the costs of traditional education or certification programs.
- **Job Placement Opportunities:** Many SkillBridge participants are offered full-time employment with their host companies, streamlining the job search process.
- **Networking:** Build connections in the civilian workforce and expand your professional network while still in uniform.

Additional Tips for Success

- **Start Early:** Begin planning your SkillBridge participation at least 6-12 months before your separation date to ensure everything runs smoothly.
- **Seek Mentorship:** Connect with veterans who have successfully navigated the SkillBridge process for advice.
- **Leverage Resources:** Utilize the resources provided by your base, the Department of Labor, and the VA to assist with job applications, resume writing, and interviews.