

Thursday's Service Champion is the Georgia Department of Veterans Service

Mark Bannister, Director of Operations, who oversees Human Resources, IT, and records management at the Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS), can easily explain how to show gratitude to veterans. In fact, it is inherent in GDVS's mission, which is to serve more than 750,000 veterans and their families in all matters related to veterans' benefits. Mr. Bannister, who served in the U.S. Army for 20 years before joining GDVS, finds that when many veterans leave the service they seek preparation for returning to civilian life and finding employment. Some veterans may need guidance on how to market valuable skills gained in the military as transferable to successful performance in civilian jobs. Veterans receive such assistance through GDVS and from referrals to other State agencies.

Mr. Bannister emphasizes that veterans are "owed a debt of gratitude for their service." An agency can show its appreciation by providing a favorable competitive advantage for qualified veterans seeking employment with the State. This veterans' preference is specifically authorized in the Constitution of the State of Georgia, State law, and State Personnel Board (SPB) Rule 18, *Veterans' Preference*. Mr. Bannister recommends that State agencies familiarize themselves with this Rule, as it includes specifications for determining if a veteran or spouse is eligible for certain prescribed preferences. To view SPB Rule 18, *Veterans' Preference*, click [here](#).

GDVS lists its job vacancies on the Team Georgia Careers website, which incorporates a notice to applicants in the "Frequency Asked Questions" (FAQ) describing points granted for veterans' preference. This notice lets veterans know immediately that GDVS supports veterans' preference.

The State application offers a simple way for applicants to communicate their eligibility for veterans' preference. GDVS reviews the applications for such a disclosure to ensure they are offering veterans preference when appropriate.

If your agency does not use numerically scored written examinations to fill positions, you must give appropriate consideration to persons eligible for veterans' preference. When screening applications, a key component of veterans' preference is to give credit for time spent in the U.S. Armed Forces during a period of armed conflict when a veteran was previously employed in a similar job to the advertised vacancy and employment in that job was interrupted by the armed conflict and resumed after discharge.

When a qualifying veteran, or the spouse of a qualifying disabled or deceased veteran, applies for initial State employment, the individual may be eligible to receive 5 or 10 points added to their entrance exam passing score. Mr. Bannister explains that because GDVS does not administer formal pre-employment testing, it utilizes a method of adding points to its scored interview for eligible veterans. GDVS also utilizes veterans' preference as an objective judgment call when an eligible veteran's qualifications for a position are equivalent to those of the most suitable non-veteran applicant. SPB Rule 18 provides for preference for the veteran over the equivalent non-veteran in such a scenario. Mr. Bannister clarifies that when GDVS hires a veteran, it is doing so to bring to the agency the individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's), not merely to hire a veteran.

Mr. Bannister envisions all State agencies not only utilizing veterans' preference but also making efforts to hire more veterans. He suggests one way to reach more veteran applicants, as GDVS does, is to use the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL) as a talent resource. GDOL's Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) and Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists work directly to assist veterans find employment opportunities and are always seeking employers to actively recruit veterans. Mr. Bannister feels strongly that veterans make excellent employees. He explains, "they are already well-trained and come from a culture of accomplishing missions. They have leadership talents, are multi-taskers, and accept change." He further describes veterans as "loyal, on-time, selfless, and ready to provide service to help others." He implores other State HR Staff to consider promoting veterans' preference within their agencies, as well as making efforts to attract veteran candidates who have military values and skills.