ID # (assigned by CSG): 12-S-32-WV

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: West Virginia

Assign Program Category (applicant): Workforce development

Program Name: WVMilitaryConnection.org
Administering Agency: WorkForce West Virginia
Contact (Name and Title): Beth Carenbauer, Director, Business Services and Human Resources
Address: 112 California Avenue, Charleston, WV 25305
Telephone Number: 304-558-7024
E-mail Address: Beth.N.Carenbauer@wv.gov
Web Address: www.wvmilitaryconnection.org

How long has this program operated (month and year)? Work on the initiative began in July 2011, and the web site went live on November 23, 2011 followed by a formal site launch by Governor Tomblin on January 18, 2012.

Describe the program. Thousands of West Virginia troops are returning home from the conflict in Iraq, joining other Veterans and service members in a tough job market and economy. Thanks to a ground-breaking partnership in West Virginia, returning troops, active military and Veterans, as well as their family members, have access to a single, comprehensive list of resources designed specifically for them at WVMilitaryConnection.org.

The web site includes links to local, state, federal and private sector assistance for service members in the areas of Employment, Training & Education, Benefits, Healthcare, and Family Resources.

“There certainly is no lack of effort to give back to those in uniform, but there has perhaps in the past been a lack of coordination – and this web site is a major step in unifying assistance to our military personnel, past and present,” West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin said in unveiling the web site in January 2012. “We are setting precedence by uniting our efforts to serve those who have served us with
the hope that this integrated directory of services will establish a starting point for service members who might be unsure of what is available to them.”

The site provides contacts for little-known benefits, such as funding for assisted living. It offers guidance in converting military experience toward civilian careers, and provides career development information for service members unsure about next steps in employment.

Initial partners in WVMilitaryConnection.org include WorkForce West Virginia, Employer Services for the Guard and Reserve, West Virginia Veterans Assistance, U.S. Department of Labor Veterans Program, West Virginia National Guard. Additional partners include WV Community and Technical Colleges, WV Higher Education, and the U.S. Veterans Administration.

In addition to the unprecedented partnership, the focus of the site is unique in its application to all military service personnel: returning troops, active military, and Veterans. Another distinguishing factor is the program’s outreach to families.

Work on the partnership began in July 2011, when the WorkForce West Virginia was approached by the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Employment Initiative to create a single web site with resources for all West Virginia military personnel. The web site partners included the WV Department of Veterans Assistance, U.S. Department of Labor VETS Program and the WV National Guard. With support from Governor Earl Ray Tomblin and WV Commerce Secretary Keith Burdette, WorkForce West Virginia agreed to oversee and fund development of a comprehensive site that would be designed by WV Commerce Communications.

In late September 2011, work began on the web initiative. A simple and colorful logo was created, web site domain names registered, and the basic resources for the site were outlined: Employment, Health Care, Education & Training, Benefits and Family Resources. Other key features of the site would be a prominent Email icon and a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to provide quick response to users and to prompt users new to the site. In addition to the site development, marketing materials for the partnership, including a tri-fold, wallet cards, posters and flyers were designed for a consistent brand.

The partners met monthly to review and revise the web site, and coordinate marketing efforts for the initiative. Initial plans to take the site live on Veterans Day were not feasible and site made a “soft launch” without any promotion on Wednesday, November 23, the day before Thanksgiving. Even without publicity, the site received hundreds of online visitors.

On Wednesday, January 18, Governor Tomblin officially unveiled the web site with a live demonstration of the resources available. All partners were represented and every major television network covered the event. The event was picked up by the Associated Press (AP) and was carried in newspapers throughout the state.

“Those of you who have not yet had the opportunity to explore this web site are really going to be impressed,” Governor Tomblin said at the event. “It essentially serves as a centralized online database that links returning troops, active military and veterans, as well as the their family members, to a comprehensive list of various resources designed specifically for them.”
“These resources include State, Federal & private sector employment, training, education, benefits, healthcare & family services programs. I don’t have to tell you, in West Virginia we understand that our military personnel and veterans have unique situations and needs, and we must do whatever we can to support them,” the Governor continued. “Across the state and country right now countless individuals and groups are coming together to help veterans and all military families find housing, employment, health care and education, among others. Sometimes, though, the greatest challenge is raising awareness of these programs and connecting services to the individuals who need them most.”

In just four weeks, from January 18 through February 12, 2012, the site had 3,755 page views. Not surprisingly, the top category visited was employment. However, the number two category, and the resource where users spent the most time, was Benefits. The detailed site usage reports indicate the type of assistance that service members and their families are seeking.

Through bimonthly meetings, the partners address emerging critical needs for service members, such as how to make it easier for service personnel to obtain civilian certification for skills acquired on duty. Other targeted needs include housing vouchers for families and access to substance abuse programs. The partnership will also be addressing studies by the Society of Human Resource Management and Workforce Management which indicate that 65 percent of employers steer clear of hiring National Guardsmen due to multiple deployments.

In a world of global competition, there is no better preparation than local support. This effort proves that workforce development requires support services for individuals as well as their families. The inclusive and targeted approach of WVMilitaryConnection.org for employment and support of West Virginia service personnel makes this effort worthy of consideration for the 2012 CSG Innovations Awards.

Did this program originate in your state? Yes. WorkForce West Virginia was approached by the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Employment Initiative to create a single web site with resources for all West Virginia military personnel. The web site partners include the WV Department of Veterans Assistance, U.S. Department of Labor VETS Program and the WV National Guard. Other program partners include the U.S. Veterans Administration, the WV Community and Technical College System and the WV Higher Education Policy Commission.

Are you aware of similar programs in other states? We are not aware of another collaboration of this magnitude. This effort is unique in its broad partnership to serve 1) all military personnel, including returning troops, active service members such as National Guard and Veterans, and 2) its holistic approach to workforce development, providing employment information as well as health care and family resources.

What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter when attempting to adopt this program? It can be difficult to bring all players to the table. As mentioned, there is no lack of initiatives to serve military personnel, and there are new programs emerging almost daily. With every new program comes a new set of rules and regulations and new administrative which may be duplicative or overlapping, and getting all the current and new providers to work together can be challenging.

CSG reserves the right to use or publish in other CSG products the information provided in this application. If your agency objects to this policy, please advise us in a separate attachment.
Use these as guidelines to determine the appropriate Program Category for your state’s submission and list that program category on page one of this application. Choose only one.

**Infrastructure and Economic Development**
- Business/Commerce
- Economic Development
- Transportation

**Government Operations and Technology**
- Administration
- Elections
- Information Systems
- Public Information
- Revenue
- Telecommunications

**Health & Human Services**
- Aging
- Children & Families
- Health Services
- Housing
- Human Services

**Human Resources/Education**
- Education
- Labor
- Management
- Personnel
- Training and Development
- Workforce Development

**Natural Resources**
- Agriculture
- Energy
- Environment
- Environmental Protection
- Natural Resources
- Parks & Recreation
- Water Resources

**Public Safety/Corrections**
- Corrections
- Courts
- Criminal Justice
- Drugs
- Emergency Management
- Public Safety

Save in .doc or rtf. Return completed application AND video (if applicable) electronically to innovations@csg.org or mail to:

CSG Innovations Awards
The Council of State Governments
2760 Research Park Drive
Lexington, KY 40511

**Contact:**
Nancy J. Vickers, National Program Administrator
Phone: 859.244.8105
Fax: 859.244.8001 – Attn: Innovations Awards Program
The Council of State Governments
E-mail: nvickers@csg.org

This application is also available at www.csg.org.