

AECOM mentors help veterans thrive

AECOM employees are honored to mentor U.S. veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce

For 14 years, AECOM has been a proud partner and sponsor of American Corporate Partners' (ACP) mentorship program. ACP supports U.S. veterans as they transition from military service to the civilian workforce by providing online career guidance, mentoring, and networking career opportunities. AECOM is among the more than 100 corporate partners currently working with the nonprofit to help counter underemployment among an estimated one million veterans during the next five years.

"It's typical for veterans to question how much of their experience will be useful in the private sector," said AECOM's Michael Stiller, who started mentoring with ACP in 2015, "but the skills, work habits, communication, and many other aspects of their military background are significant positives for private sector capabilities."



AECOM

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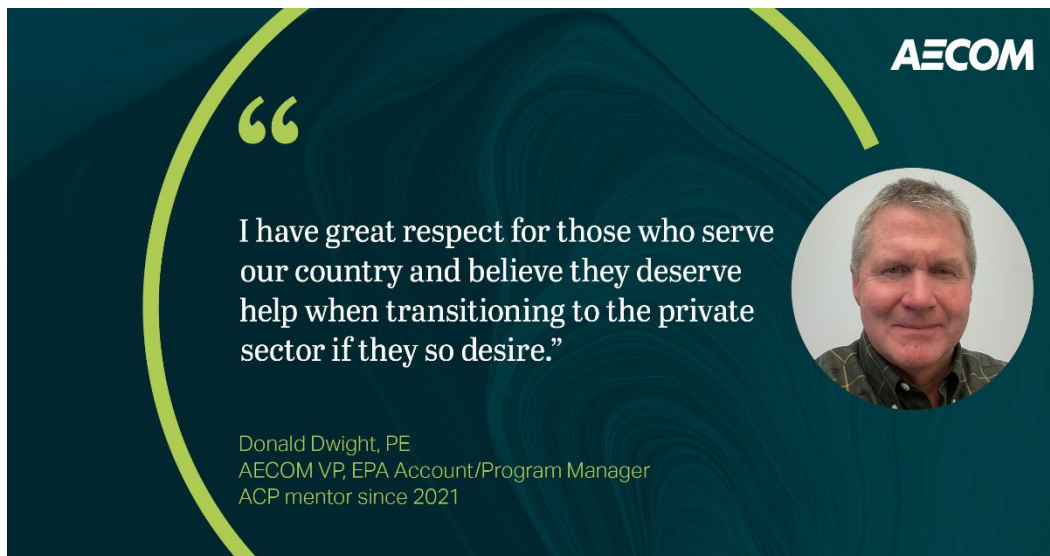
Whether it's a protégé just entering the private sector or someone older looking for a career change or advancement, it's rewarding to see their personal growth and career development. I also learn something new with every mentorship.”

Michael Stiller, PE, LSP
AECOM AVP, Program Manager
ACP mentor since 2015

"To be honest, I was scared," said Shelby Montana Harris, who goes by Montana. "When I separated from the Navy, I knew I wanted to go back to school and change career fields, but I didn't have a clue how to accomplish a task that seemed almost impossible."


Both Montana and U.S. Army veteran Brent Johnson found help through ACP where they were paired with AECOM mentors. "The ACP mentorship program...provided me with a safe space where I could ask questions and receive guidance from a like-minded mentor within my career field," said Brent.

AECOM mentors see job-seeking veterans as highly talented candidates with a lot to offer. "Many veterans and service members have already been trained for leadership and technical positions and just need advice on how to enhance their credentials," said mentor Don Dwight. "The right credentials coupled with their experiences puts them in position for the private sector."



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I have great respect for those who serve our country and believe they deserve help when transitioning to the private sector if they so desire.”



Donald Dwight, PE
AECOM VP, EPA Account/Program Manager
ACP mentor since 2021

AECOM’s Michelle Sweeney agreed, adding, “A hard work ethic and a positive attitude are invaluable in any workplace.” With relatives in the U.S. Navy, Michelle started mentoring with ACP in 2020 to give back to those with similar experiences.

To date, 316 AECOM employees have mentored 740 veterans and military spouses through the program. Last year alone, 2,463 protégés secured meaningful employment during the ACP mentorship process and 100 percent of those mentored by AECOM participants said they would recommend the program.



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I have a lot of respect for those that have given so much of their time and talents and have made sacrifices... Our veterans have very unique stories and backgrounds and I find them all very interesting.”



Michelle Sweeney, PE, PTOE
AECOM Senior Project Manager
ACP mentor since 2020

The mentorship process typically involves a yearlong commitment. The structure entails monthly opportunities for mentor-protégés to discuss goals and issues by phone, videoconference, email, or in person, and often includes resume critiques and interview preparation. Each relationship is handpicked by ACP staff based on age, education level, location, shared career interests, and other factors.

“This was a particular demographic where I knew my personal experience could have impact,” said AECOM’s Galen Cooter, who experienced his own difficulties in transitioning to the private sector

after leaving the U.S. Marine Corps more than 16 years ago. “Veterans face a lot of unique issues,” he said, “and many simply fear leaving the world they’ve been living in for so long.”

With Galen’s help, veteran Stanley Reimer found better footing in the civilian landscape. “It was hugely valuable to interact with someone who has an established career and real-time experience with the current nuances of the job market,” he said. “I would highly recommend the program.”

For mentors like Galen, ACP is about helping fellow veterans navigate a career trajectory they’ve experienced firsthand. “We have our own language, but it’s about understanding how to translate someone’s military experience to the private sector.” Galen has enjoyed coaching Brent, Stanley, and others since 2019.



While many ACP mentors are veterans themselves, it isn’t a requirement for participation. Vijay Agrawal applied after taking a road trip with an AECOM colleague who’d previously transitioned from a career with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. “I learned from him that some veterans experience a lot of stress when trying to settle back into civilian life,” he said. “Giving back some time and sharing my knowledge with veterans who bring their diverse and unique experiences to the industry is the most satisfying outcome.”

“We’ve been around long enough to know that our program works,” said Jana Toner, senior vice president of ACP. Since its start in 2008, the organization has been actively tracking rates of employment and satisfaction among participants. “Our protégés benefit from ACP’s emphasis on finding the right fit for the individual,” she said. While surveys indicate lower job retention among the broader veteran community, according to Jana, rates are much higher for ACP participants. “Since 2019, 85 percent of those who obtained employment during their ACP mentorship stayed with that job for a year or longer.”



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Vijay Agrawal, PE
AECOM VP, Director - Goods Movement
ACP mentor since 2020


A military spouse and former ACP protégé herself, Sarah Glendon is one of those success stories. She landed her current job at AECOM with the help of her own ACP mentor. “I was so immensely grateful for her expertise and guidance that I applied to be a mentor myself when I learned AECOM participated.” ACP matched Sarah with Montana, who now works in her chosen career field while attending graduate school to further her specialization.

“She’s my biggest cheerleader and a trusted friend,” Montana said. “I can honestly say that without ACP and my mentor Sarah, I would not be where I am today.” Sarah is now in the process of mentoring a third protégé who would like to follow in her footsteps as an environmental scientist.



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The most satisfying aspect is seeing my mentees develop confidence... Whether it’s getting into grad school, landing an internship, or networking in their field, the veterans I’ve worked with have asked, ‘is it possible?’ and then answered with a resounding YES.”



Sarah Glendon
AECOM Environmental Scientist
ACP mentor since 2020

It’s clear protégés aren’t the only ones benefiting from the process. According to ACP surveys, nearly 100 percent of AECOM’s mentors have expressed satisfaction with the program. Most of these coaches convey a deep sense of gratification in helping others, and many find lasting connections.

“I really enjoy helping them prepare for their next career,” said Michelle, who is currently coaching her fourth protégé. “Our veterans have very unique stories and backgrounds and I find them all very interesting.”

“Some of the personal connections have been very rewarding,” said Michael, who has mentored 10 ACP protégés in the last seven years. “I also learn something new with every mentorship.”

For veterans wondering where to begin their career transition, Michael encourages them to reach out. “There are many opportunities available, and ACP—with its strong network of resources—is a great place to start.”

ACP is always looking for new people to pair with the 700 veterans currently seeking mentors. If you’d like to become an AECOM mentor, contact AECOM’s ACP liaison Phil Niskanen. For more information on ACP’s programs, visit www.acp-usa.org.

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