



THE ACADEMY OF ELECTRICAL CONTRACTING

PAPER PRESENTED BY FELLOW
RICK JARVIS ('22)

**SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE US: VEEP AND A PATHWAY FOR
VETERANS TO BECOME JOURNEYMEN**

JUNE 2026

In any given room of NECA leaders and on any given jobsite, you are likely to find veterans.

While I wouldn't suggest that completing electrical projects and serving our country carry the same gravity or purpose, what is required of the members of each have clear overlap: Ours is an industry that requires discipline and respect for the chain of command. It requires commitment to intensive training when starting and ongoing training throughout a career. Committing to being a lifelong learner is a must.

Moreover, electrical workers agree to do dangerous work for the sake of the team. At our best, we have each other's backs, and we function as a focused unit.

We also have intersecting needs. Far too many people transition from the armed forces and enter uncertain professional futures while our industry is experiencing a growing challenge around adequate numbers of qualified workers.

At this intersection, the Veteran Electrical Entry Program (VEEP) offers a solution.

I support VEEP not only for the future of our industry but for respect of the people who risk their lives to protect us. By the end of this paper, I hope that you'll have the information and motivation to support VEEP, too.

Origins of VEEP

The VEEP program initiative first saw the light of day in the land of the midnight sun: Anchorage, Alaska. Developed by the Electrical Training Alliance (ETA), the mission from the beginning was to give service members a structured transition pathway into high-demand electrical careers with the potential for ongoing career development and the ability to return to wherever they called home.

Many local IBEW organizers and ETA personnel worked to secure Skill Bridge approval which enabled servicemembers to complete the program during their last 180 days of active duty. The military embraced the program due to the three-fold opportunities to smooth the transition out of active duty, set servicemembers up for solid earnings, and address veteran suicide rates by helping former military embed in areas of existing social support. VEEP was also structured to be available to recently separated veterans.

The first cohort of 11 VEEP trainees met in 2019 through IBEW Local 1547. In a training center near Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson and in the midst of the largest veteran population in the state, participants spent seven full-time weeks immersed in a pre-apprenticeship program that covered core electrical skills including:

- Electrical theory
- Safety
- Code fundamentals
- Math
- Hands-on evaluation

While many of these topics will be familiar to trainees through their previous education and military training, the program is committed to training that starts from brass tacks to ensure comprehensive understanding. As such, VEEP graduates tend to enter apprenticeship programs with more robust foundational training than the average apprenticeship candidate.

These graduates were then placed into IBEW/NECA-affiliated apprenticeship programs across the United States such that veterans were enabled to return home, or where they wanted to make a home. Often, these placements happen with direct entry into a local apprenticeship without the traditional application waitlist.

The second cohort of VEEP in Alaska more than doubled the success of the first cohort with 24 graduates who were reported to be prepared to enter the second year of apprenticeship training. Most VEEP graduates are enrolled as 1st year apprentices following the pre-apprenticeship program, local parties determine these details including starting wage rate once indentured into apprenticeship.

To make the program as accessible as possible and integrate university-based math programming, the ETA launched a remote-learning version of VEEP soon thereafter. This curriculum was supported by partner institutions (for example, the University of Tennessee for math) and covered first-year apprenticeship topics such as:

- Blueprints
- Safety
- Code Study
- Electrical theory

In 2021, Army veteran Raul Gutierrez became the first graduate of the virtual program and went on to begin his apprenticeship with IBEW Local 112 in Kennewick, WA.

As the idea spread, so, too, did the locations with new VEEP training sites appearing in other regions with proximity to active-duty bases or major transportation hubs such as in Southern California, Utah and Atlanta.

We've also seen pilot programs created to diversify the trades, including all-women veteran cohorts.

Despite the expansion, the demand from veterans is still far from met. Given the current and projected shortage of skilled labor across the US, the need for local JATC programs to adopt VEEP and incorporate enabling language for direct hire is in high demand. Pre-apprenticeship programs including VEEP are more necessary than ever before.

The growth has been noticed, too. In late 2025, VEEP was named a national finalist for a major economic-mobility grant which could provide funding to further expand veteran pathways to employment.

While it would be impossible to name everyone who has made this program the fast-growing success it is already becoming, there are two people without whom none of this would be possible:

General Ron Bailey, Vice President, Industry Development at NECA National who has been championing multi-faced approaches to enhancing and growing our workforce, including in the recruitment of veterans.

Sergeant Major Mike Kufchak, IBEW Local 11, Director of Veterans Affairs and Military Outreach at the Net Zero Plus Electrical Training Institute, who worked in collaboration with the local leadership in Los Angeles JATC to create the pathway from VEEP to apprenticeship and secure higher pay for these workers.

The program is proven. Veterans are showing up. It's up to our JATC's to give them a place to land.

The Elephant in the Room

One sentence above might have caught your attention in particular: "Often, these placements happened with direct entry into a local apprenticeship without the traditional application waitlist."

This direct entry is integral to the VEEP program and yet it can strike some of us as counter to all that we've done as a community to create a process that is grounded in fairness and equity. Why, then, would we upend this well-established process of testing, interviewing, and the pool of eligible list for this one population?

While there will be exceptions to every rule, early data suggests that veteran apprentices, because of their military training and VEEP pre-apprenticeship, join our ranks particularly prepared and of particular value to their team. Servicemembers, for example, have unique experience working in complex and dangerous environments in which vigilance and teamwork can mean the difference between success and injury.

Moreover, VEEP participants also leave the VEEP pre-apprenticeship program having completed the entire first year IBEW-NECA-ETA curriculum for Inside Wiremen, giving them a distinct head start in their apprenticeship training.

At the end of the day, though, this is about who we are and who we want to be as an industry. The vision of VEEP fits neatly into the vision, mission, and core values of NECA:

Our vision: Empowering Lives and Communities

From our Mission: Attract, develop and retain the best talent *and* collaborate with world-class partners to advance our industry.

Milwaukee Tool, a Premier Partner with NECA is a great example of an industry partner that supports the VEEP program and the graduates. To quote Steve Richman of Milwaukee tool, “VEEP has my highest endorsement and is a model that should be mirrored throughout the trades!”

From our Core Values:

- Leadership: To be the driving force to shape our industry
- Accountability: We measure what we do with a commitment to continuous improvement, transparency and integrity
- Innovation: A declaration to be more effective through delivering creative solutions
- Stewardship: Invest in our people and industry to leave our world a safer and better place for future generations

By clearing the pathway for veterans to join the electrical industry, we are not only honoring those who have served our country courageously, we are also enhancing our industry with their training, character, and discipline.

Where You Fit In

As with all innovations, change starts with an idea. VEEP has given you that.

Then, come relationships. For decades, NECA and IBEW have been forming and forging the partnership required to make the VEEP program work.

That brings us to you, a potential and needed champion of VEEP.

There are two primary ways that you can support the growth of the VEEP initiative:

1. Support the creation of a VEEP training site in your local area
2. Encourage your company and your local NECA Chapter leadership to include VEEP trainees in apprenticeship programs including direct entry.

Of course, these are not mutually exclusive; you could explore doing both and the Electrical Training Alliance (ETA) is there to help you decide and implement.

The steps of exploring becoming a training center are:

1. Local NECA and IBEW leaders meet to discuss and vote on the possibility of developing a training site
2. If the vote is positive, the ETA is then brought in to assist local parties with design and implementation of a local VEEP Program

In fact, the ETA – Jason Ainelli is currently the point of contact and an excellent resource to help your team. For those interested in exploring a local training site, the ETA will conduct discussions with local leaders to decide whether your local is a good fit to become a training site and, if so, the type of program (in-person, computer-mediated learning, hybrid). The ETA will also then develop the curriculum to be delivered to veteran trainees.

That is, ETA does the heaviest lifting. For NECA members, the responsibilities include:

- Expressing initial interest
- If a training program is a go, decide how many classes will be held annually and the size of each class. (Most locals run 1-2 classes per year max; the largest program, in Los Angeles, is run four times per year.)
- Working with the IBEW and JATC to identify an instructor, preferably a veteran though that is not a requirement

Including VEEP graduates into local apprenticeship programs is an even simpler process, requiring only that you give ETA a best guess for how many graduates you can take in the coming year of apprenticeship. An estimate, however, is not a commitment; if industry sluggishness means taking on fewer apprentices, the number can be amended to appropriate levels, even if that means taking no VEEP graduates in that calendar year.

As you can see, both the efforts by and risks for the local electrical industry are minimal while the potential payoff is one of well-trained apprentices joining teams in your local.

In Summary

Jason Menes, a general field superintendent with us at Morrow-Meadows Corporation put it this way: “As a field manager for the past 26 years, I have seen many programs directed at recruiting the best candidates into the Electrical Apprenticeship programs and the graduates of the VEEP program overall have stood tall above the rest. They are clearly coming from an environment which shares a similar work ethic to what is needed to be successful in the construction industry.

Meanwhile, veteran after veteran describes VEEP as a stabilizing force for their careers and families as they transitioned out of the military. As a small sample and feedback from our local VEEP graduates: Matt Lee noted overall increased life satisfaction, Ivan Martinez feels grateful for the growth potential in our field, and Able Jimenez is so enthusiastic about his experience that he routinely shares his experience with friends in and out of the military.

These aren’t cherry-picked case studies; these are stories about how we’ve been reinforcing the backbone of a growing company in a growing industry in need of reliable professionals in our trucks and on our worksites.

If you share our values for our industry, if you share our vision for growth, the next step is with VEEP.



About Rick Jarvis

Rick Jarvis started his NECA/IBEW Apprenticeship Program in 1982 in San Diego, CA. IBEW local 569. Immediately after completing the program in 1986, he was selected to attend the NECA Foremanship class from which he graduated with a promotion to the position of foreman by his then and current employer, Morrow-Meadows Corporation. Following his apprenticeship, Rick was promoted through the ranks of JW, Foreman, General Foreman, General Field Superintendent, Vice President of Field Construction, and currently holds the position of Executive Vice President of Operations for Morrow-Meadows Corporation where he has enjoyed 42 years of continuous employment. Rick has also served on the Los Angeles

NECA Board of Directors for the past 15 years and has served in various positions as Director, Secretary, Treasurer, Vice President, President, and the Chapter's Governor for two terms. He also served 22 years on the Los Angeles Joint Apprenticeship Committee including 2 years as the Committee's Chairman. The NECA Coggeshall Award recipient in 2022 highlights Rick's commitment to training and he considers supporting VECP as the right thing to do for our veterans.