



THE BOOT

Your Life, Our Mission.

ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2025 – 2026



RECRUIT • RETURN • RETAIN



ABOUT THE BOOT

MISSION

The Boot exists to recruit, retain, and return military service members and their families to Louisiana, changing the way transitioning service members experience their next chapter and find success in the civilian world.

VISION

To make Louisiana the premier destination for military families transitioning to civilian life, where opportunity, community, and quality of life come together in service of those who have served.

WITH THE BOOT, IT'S PERSONAL

We've walked this path ourselves. Every service member gets one-on-one support built around their goals, not a generic playbook, because transition is about finding purpose, community, and a place to call home, not just a job.

ROOTED IN LOUISIANA

We believe Louisiana has everything military families need to thrive: its culture, affordable cost of living, family-centered communities, and deep appreciation for service. We connect people to the state we love and the networks that make it home.

SERVICE NEVER STOPS

Led by veterans who understand the mission mindset, we show up for our people the way the military taught us to show up for each other, with commitment, follow-through, and a human touch at every step.

From Proof to Scale

The past year marked an important turning point for The Boot. What began as an ambitious vision has matured into a proven workforce development model that is delivering measurable results for Louisiana. Together with our employers, community partners, and supporters, we have now generated an estimated \$28.2 million in cumulative economic impact for the State of Louisiana by helping transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses build meaningful careers here at home.



Andrew Ward

Founder, The Boot

This year also brought national recognition when Hiring Our Heroes honored The Boot with its Military Spouse Employment Award, recognizing our innovative work to remove barriers and create career opportunities for military spouses across Louisiana. These milestones affirm what we have believed from the beginning, that investing in military families is one of the smartest economic development strategies our state can make. Today, our mission is no longer to prove this model works. Our mission is to scale it.

As we look ahead, our focus is on expanding our reach, strengthening strategic partnerships, and ensuring that every transitioning service member and military spouse sees Louisiana not simply as a place they served, but as the place they choose to build their future. None of this would be possible without the employers who have opened their doors, the philanthropic and public partners who have invested in our vision, and the dedicated team that works every day to connect exceptional talent with exceptional opportunity.

Together, we are building a stronger workforce, stronger communities, and a stronger Louisiana. Thank you for believing in this mission and for helping The Boot continue to grow into a nationally recognized model that is creating lasting opportunity for military families while strengthening our state's economy for generations to come.

The Roux is Set



I was born in New Orleans and grew up in Thibodaux. My mother was a great cook, but Cajun food wasn't in her repertoire. My friends' parents and our neighbors sure as heck cooked it, though, and I ate it up. In my late twenties I finally told myself, "You're from Louisiana. You should have a gumbo recipe." So I set off. Then I met the roux. Turns out that's where you start: flour and oil in a hot pot, and then you stand there and stir. And stir. You don't walk away. You don't rush it. It was a commitment I didn't know I was signing up for, because the second you stop paying attention, it burns.

Last year, at The Boot, we made the roux. In year one, we cut a path for our service members into Louisiana: into our communities, our employers, our culture. This year, the pot started filling up. More service members found us upstream, before the uniform came off. More partners pulled up a chair. More employers, more communities, more families who decided Louisiana was going to be home. That's the thing about gumbo. The roux is the foundation, but it's only ever as good as what everybody brings to the pot. Our staff brought the work, the slow and patient one-on-one attention that shows up in a life, not a headline. Our partners brought trust, resources, and opportunity. And the men and women we serve brought the very thing that makes this state worth landing in: people who know how to show up and get it done.

The pages that follow are what happens when you don't walk away from the pot. They document the growth we built together this year: the numbers, and the people behind them. We're not done. A rising pot needs more hands, and we intend to keep adding them until every service member who comes home to Louisiana knows there's a place set for them here. Thank you for stirring alongside us.

Ben Armstrong

Chief Executive Officer, The Boot

A Look Into LCEs

One of The Boot's pillars is the Louisiana Community Experiences (LCE's) we host throughout the year. We engage with regional partners who assist with planning, speakers, outreach, etc. in an effort to both show off their community and to support the Boot's candidates in engaging with careers, community, and culture of the region. The best part: not one is the same as the last.



**FORT POLK
GATOR HUNT
DOWN THE BAYOU
NOLA**

43
EMPLOYERS ENGAGED
64
PARTICIPANTS THIS YEAR

Who Are Our Candidates?

522 qualified transitioning service members have registered to pursue civilian careers in Louisiana, and **366** have been placed in careers since launching in 2024, a vetted, career-focused pipeline aligned to Louisiana's industries and regions.

BRANCH OF SERVICE

Primarily **Army** and **Air Force** from Fort Polk and Barksdale AFB, with representation from the Marine Corps, Navy, National Guard, and Coast Guard.

RANK & EXPERIENCE

Experienced mid-level leaders (E4–E8): team leads, shift supervisors, and frontline managers. Many bring 6 to 20 years of service, including direct supervisory responsibility.

This is not an entry-level workforce. Candidates arrive proven, accountable, and mission-ready.

Managed high-value equipment

Enforced safety & standards

Compliance-driven environments

Mission-critical under pressure

OCCUPATIONAL BACKGROUND

- Operations & Team Leadership
- Logistics & Supply Chain
- Transportation / Heavy Equipment & Mechanics
- Construction & Infrastructure
- IT & Communications
- HR & Administration

TARGET AREAS

Candidates are primarily targeting **Shreveport–Bossier, Fort Polk / Lake Charles, New Orleans & the Northshore, Lafayette, and Baton Rouge.**

CAREER INTERESTS

Logistics & supply chain, IT & cybersecurity, government, construction, HR, public safety, aviation, and defense, sectors central to Louisiana's economy.

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN EXPECT

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Real-world leadership experience• Comfortable in team-based, safety-driven settings• Understands accountability & performance standards | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has managed people, equipment & time-sensitive ops• Motivated to build long-term careers in Louisiana• Used to structured advancement & compliance |
|---|--|

At a Glance



\$19.7M

ECONOMIC IMPACT

255

TOTAL PLACEMENTS

228

EVENTS HELD

371

LACES PARTNERS
(Employers)

327

NEW CANDIDATES

HOW MUCH WE GREW

Year Over Year

Placements



Events



Economic Impact



Employer Partners



 FY 2024-25  FY 2025-26

DOUBLING DOWN

Placements more than doubled and economic impact more than doubled year over year. Economic impact reflects an updated per-candidate methodology, detailed on the following page.

ALL-TIME TOTALS *SINCE LAUNCHING IN 2024*

\$28.2M

ECONOMIC IMPACT

366

PLACED IN CAREERS

522

CANDIDATES REGISTERED

By the Numbers

For the Fiscal Year of 2025/2026:

72%

RETAINED

17%

RETURNED

11%

RECRUITED

How this year's candidate pipeline breaks down by origin.

PLACEMENTS

255 total

232 Placed in Careers

23 Training to Career

PIPELINE

327 new eligible candidates registered this FY

Gender: **86%** male **14%** female

TOP 5 ROLES SOUGHT

- 1** Skilled Trades (HVAC, Welding, Plumbing, Electrical)
- 2** Government / Federal Service
- 3** Logistics / Supply Chain
- 4** Administration / Business
- 5** Information Technology

TOP 5 INDUSTRIES

- 1** Logistics & Supply Chain
- 2** Military & Defense
- 3** Information Technology & Network Security
- 4** Government Administration
- 5** Airlines / Aviation

Economic impact is estimated at approximately \$77,200 in direct annual income per placement, combining Louisiana median household income (U.S. Census ACS, 2019–2023) with recurring federal income streams from VA disability compensation and military retired pay. These figures are weighted to reflect The Boot's placement demographics, which skew toward senior enlisted and retirement-eligible veterans. The estimate reflects direct income inflows only and excludes indirect effects, tax revenue, and healthcare offsets, making it a conservative baseline.

Programs & Accomplishments

LACES

260 NEW PARTNERS THIS YEAR

Launched with founding support from Cheniere Energy, LACES has grown into a statewide network connecting transitioning service members directly to the Louisiana employers who value their skills. Now **371** partners strong across skilled trades, energy, healthcare, IT, and logistics, the program enters year three focused on deepening employer relationships and building a seamless path from service to opportunity in every corner of the state.



Warrior to Welding

Delivered in partnership with Performance Contractors, Warrior to Welding turns military discipline into skilled welding careers through their Built to Serve workforce development program. Performance embraces the experience, commitment, and culture that military service brings, and is dedicated to hiring veterans and their family members and guiding them into meaningful careers. Together, the program anchors a solid pathway from service to the skilled trades, returning a measure of gratitude to those who served.



Awards & Honors



2026 COMMUNITY LEADER IMPACT AWARD

Louisiana was named the 2026 Community Leader Impact Award recipient by Hiring Our Heroes, accepted by The Boot alongside Secretary Charlton Meginley and the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs at the 10th Annual Military Spouse Employment Summit in Washington, D.C. The award recognizes states building inclusive environments where military spouses can thrive. Because transition does not happen in isolation, supporting the whole family, especially military spouses, is central to The Boot's mission. Strong families build strong veterans.



Voices



“Transitioning out of the military is no joke. Excitement, anxiety and overwhelming emotions will be experienced throughout the process. The Boot will help! Powerful springboard into a civilian career. Everything is free, no pressure and customized based on your needs and experience.”

Chris F. · Service Member



“Our collaboration with The Boot has elevated Bechtel's Veteran Program in Louisiana, connecting us with talented service members ready for meaningful careers. We're growing stronger together, and veterans are winning because of it.”

Jennifer Brown | Veteran Program Manager · Employer Partner



“Their success relies on each Veteran's success. Failure is not an option for them so they go far to find you employment.”

Dave L. · Service Member



Our Partners

260 new partners signed up in the FY – for a total of 371 LACES Partners across the State. The overwhelming majority engaged as employment-focused partners: hiring managers (100) and HR representatives (93) together account for the bulk of submissions, followed by industry liaisons and senior executives.

Partner interest is heavily weighted toward direct hiring, giving The Boot a strong employer base to match against candidate demand, while mentorship, community, and training partners round out a full-spectrum support network.

Top Employer Partners



VALIANT



Funding Partners

**Louisiana Dept of Veteran Affairs
Delta Regional Authority
Cameron LNG
Philip Morris
Performance Contractors**

Top Education Partners

**Louisiana State University
System**

Nicholls State University

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE BOOT

Our Team

Andrew Ward
Founder

Ben Armstrong
CEO

Mark Collazos
Chief of Staff

Wade Franklin
Director of Programs

Lindsey Russ
Director of Marketing & Events

Jeffery Leger
Success Director

Lamar Narcisse
Success Manager

Dane Thibodeaux
Success Manager

Ben Iles
Ambassador - Fort Polk

Hannah Carey
Ambassador - Barksdale AFB

THE BOARD BEHIND THE BOOT

Board of Directors

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LABI
Chairman

Chris Landry
LTA
Vice Chairman / Treasurer

Stephanie Hartman
LED
Secretary

Mandi Mitchell
LEDA
Advisory Board

Jason F. Emert
Jones Walker
Advisory Board

Emily Anthony
SELU
Advisory Board

Joel Thames
ABC National
Advisory Board



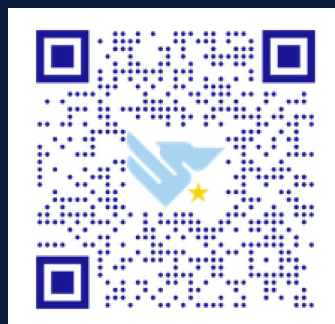
“I’m pleased The Boot has made such a substantial positive impact for Louisiana’s transitioning military and their families in so short a time. Through its global outreach to the military men and women approaching completion of their service to our country, The Boot has effectively contributed to meeting our state’s workforce needs. Louisiana’s employers and its economy are benefiting from the hard work of The Boot’s exceptional staff, and I’m proud of the results detailed in this report.

Jim Patterson | The Boot Board Chairman

WHAT COMES NEXT

Looking Ahead

This year proved the model works; next year is about reach. With 371 partners statewide and a fast-growing pipeline, The Boot is scaling what works: deepening employer ties in skilled trades, logistics, and IT, and expanding around Fort Polk, Barksdale, and beyond. Just as important is who we bring home: Louisiana natives stationed elsewhere and veterans who left for opportunity and want a way back. We're widening our reach to recruit and return them, growing our support for military spouses, and meeting each service member one-on-one, because transition isn't a transaction. The goal is no longer to prove Louisiana can be the most veteran-ready state in the country. It's to get there.



PARTNER ★ HIRE ★ SUPPORT

CUT ALONG THIS EDGE TO KEEP



Keepsake poster · A commissioned work by a Louisiana artist: HANNAH GUMBO



AMERICA'S BEST CALL LOUISIANA HOME



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