Microsoft

Tech Transition Toolkit

We know you're no stranger to overcoming obstacles in pursuit of opportunities. You've trained hard and pushed yourself. You've worked with your teams to see each mission through. And you know that even during the most challenging and unexpected times, progress is possible.

That's why Microsoft Military Affairs created this Tech Transition Toolkit: to help you take simple steps toward achieving your next goal and standing out—even virtually— in today's job market. Because no matter where you are in your journey, we know you already have what it takes to succeed.

Jump to >

Stand out from the competition

When you're looking for a new job, it's important to figure out how to distinguish yourself from other applicants. We talked to Microsoft Software and Systems Academy (MSSA) program site managers, who serve as program coordinators and career coaches for graduates, to uncover their best advice for landing a position in tech.

Network, then network some more

You've likely heard a lot about the importance of networking—and that's because it's foundational to job searching. "Both of my post-military jobs came from someone telling me about the opening because they knew me and knew I was looking for a job. Networking works!" says Jennifer Allison (Hampton Roads, Virginia). Keep in touch with people you've met in the military, and through MSSA, but also continue to make new connections. Yelena Shpigelman (Oceanside, California) urges, "Network, network, network! Building and maintaining professional relationships is paramount."

Pinpoint your specific career goals

Determining precisely what you're looking for in a career is vital. A good starting point is to think about what you want. "Start thinking about things you like to do and conduct research to determine if there's a career in that field," says Maurice Radke (Schofield Barracks, Hawaii). Once you've narrowed down your focus area, consider specifics. You may need to compromise in some areas if you can't be flexible in others. "Be honest with yourself and your wants, setting realistic expectations on what is available to you in your location of choice and the impact that has on salary," suggests Dina Janicki (Joint Base San Antonio, Texas).

Make a clear, but flexible, plan

"Stay open to all opportunities, even those that aren't a complete fit," says Jason Harvey (Fort Carson, Colorado). It can be a strategic move to just get a foot in the door in tech, rather than holding out for your ideal position. Douglas Woodruff (Fort Campbell, Kentucky) has seen many candidates from the military get lost in the vast amount of resources available; he advises shaping a specific but adaptable road map.
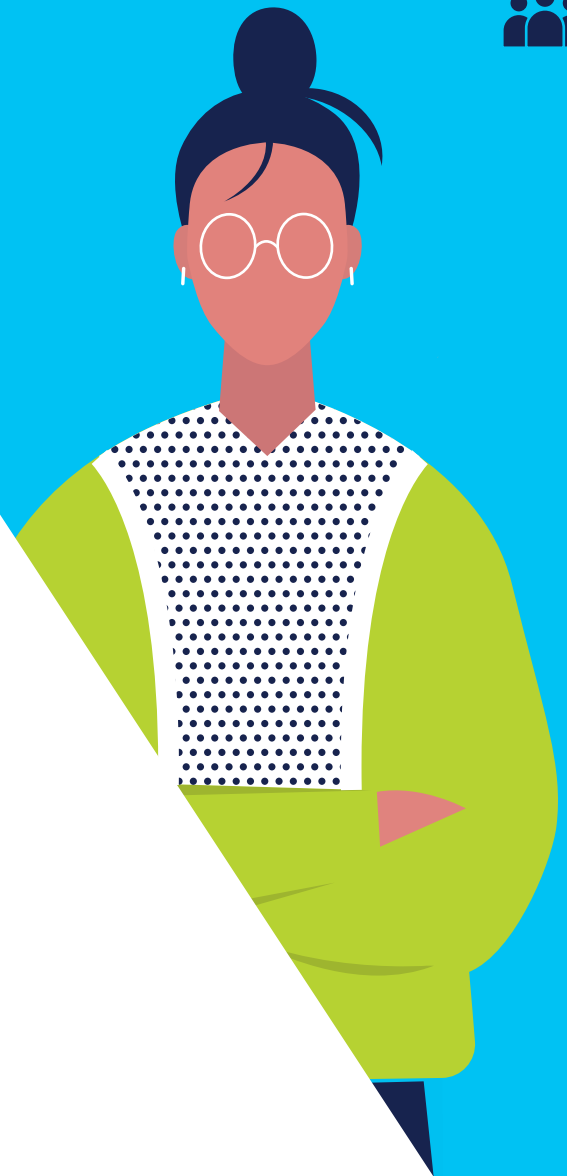
Find the right mentor for you

"Acquire a mentor in the vocation/role you're seeking," advises Terry Henderson (Fort Bragg, North Carolina). "They will help you navigate the corporate terrain." Exploring LinkedIn connections is a streamlined way to find the optimal person to advise you at each step of your career shift to tech—and then through all the ins and outs of your long-term goals. A great mentor will share advice and support over the full course of your tech career, so it's worth taking the time to find a good relationship fit. Over time, you might also consider connecting with more than one mentor to support you in different priority areas as you grow your career.

Value your own value

The way you present your military skills is important when applying for jobs in technology. Don't underestimate the full-spectrum merit you can bring to companies. "You are valuable and you have done a lot; you just need to frame it for the corporate world," says Maureen Farmer (Quantico, Virginia). It's common for people to think they're underqualified for a position; apply anyway. "It's not necessary to meet 100% of the job description requirements," Terrence M. Brown (Lacey, Washington) reminds us. "Try to meet at least 60%—and remember that includes soft skills, such as teamwork, collaboration, and time management."

Practice interviewing

"Practice, practice, practice your elevator pitch and 'tell me about yourself' response to share in interviews," advises Dayna Grimes (Camp Pendleton, California). It's crucial to be able to convince employers—in a sentence or two—why they should hire you, based on all you'll bring to the organization. Dry runs with a mentor or friend will enhance your ease in talking about these topics, and that preparation and confidence stands out in interviews. "Just like anything else, the more you rehearse, the better you will sound," says Rudy Gonzalez (Camp Lejeune, North Carolina).

Keep it up

One of the most frequent pieces of advice we heard from site managers was to not lose momentum. "The job search is all about confidence and consistency of outreach, and confidence comes from consistent engagement with your targeted market," Dave Montore (Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington) confirms. It can be dejecting to send out resumes and not hear back. But the key is to keep going. "Stay vigilant in searching for your next role," says TyRon Flynn (San Diego, California). "Don't get discouraged, persistence overrides resistance."

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Leverage your LinkedIn network

Your LinkedIn network is a valuable resource to help you stay aware of opportunities and build connections while working to forge a new career path. In fact, according to LinkedIn, 70% of people hired at a new company had a connection at that company. Knowing that's how indispensable the network can be to you, here are five tactical tips to make the most of it (plus a bonus tip!):

1

Keep your profile up to date

A current profile ensures your connections know what you're up to now—and what you're interested in for the future—whenever they may come looking. You can also use LinkedIn's badge tools to make it clear to anyone who visits your profile that you're #OpenToWork. The feature lets you easily share with your network—or even just with recruiters—that you're job searching. Remember: Networking isn't just about seeking out others; it's equally about making sure you're ready when they find you.

2

Sign up for a free one-year LinkedIn Premium membership

You can expand your network powerfully through this enhanced version of the networking tool. The InMail feature lets you contact people you aren't already connected with, and track everyone who's viewed your profile—both of which are valuable for job searching. The upgrade is available at no cost to all service members, veterans, and military spouses.

3

Leverage the
Search feature

LinkedIn Search is the easiest way to build your network on LinkedIn. With a Premium membership you'll see more than the standard 100 search results, which means you can expand the amount of potential touch points you uncover to aid your job search. The search tool also lets you filter by location, job type, or degree of contact—you can even find and sync with people who those in your first-degree network are connected to. Simply input a search, and then use the filters at the top of the results page to explore all the options at your fingertips.

4

Reach out to old
and new contacts

To build a comprehensive network you can tap whenever opportunity arises, be sure to connect with people you've worked with in previous roles. Don't be shy about reaching out, even to those you haven't had contact with recently. Just send a personalized message reminding them of your shared history to put your connection request in context. Many ask, "Should I also reach out to people I don't know?" The answer is "Yes." Just make sure you explain who you are and why you're looking to connect with them. And remember, the more you frame the reason for connection as something that could benefit them, the better the odds are that they'll accept the request.

5

Browse LinkedIn groups

Groups help boost your LinkedIn networking impact. In particular, the Veteran Mentor Network is an active community providing how-to resources for people in your same situation. Introduce yourself with a brief line about your background, and don't forget to overtly state that you're looking for a new position. To take it up yet another notch, mention that you're looking to build your network, and send connection requests (with a message explaining who you are) to anyone you'd like to talk with more—especially fellow former MSSA graduates who've found employment success, if you've enrolled in the program. Pro tip: Once you join a group, it's key to regularly interact within it, to remain memorable to active members.

Bonus reminder: Ask your network for help. A solid and active LinkedIn network (covering your military contacts and beyond) provides numerous varied avenues of support when it comes to landing a referral or learning about applicable opportunities. Not only are many jobs landed directly through such contacts, but also don't forget: All your connections also have their own mutually beneficial reasons to connect with you— and are also the perfect references to endorse you (and vice versa). It's a win-win.

Break
into tech
and thrive

Here's some pinpointed advice as you forge ahead, from military vets like you who've already successfully transitioned to civilian careers in tech:

"Be your authentic self. Don't try to fit the mold of the job—find the job that molds to you."

Lauren Capers
Azure Support Engineer at Microsoft

"If you're new to coding, get as much practice as you can. Be prepared to put in the work and it will pay off in the end."

Jerry Wright
Advanced Systems Administration Specialist at General Dynamics Mission Systems

"Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Do put the same effort into job application number 50 that you put into application number 1."

Tony Hernandez
Cloud Engineer at Anika Systems

"It's ok to fail. Don't get caught up in everything you don't know— be brilliant at the basics and the rest will follow."

Rochelle Gorbea
SharePoint Customer Engineer at Microsoft

"Don't undersell your military experience. That in itself is an invaluable asset to the tech industry."

James Koester
Help Desk Specialist at TEK Systems

Optimize your virtual workspace

By taking a handful of achievable steps, you can create a workspace to help you succeed— and avoid some of the common mishaps that arise when learning, networking, and job-hunting online. Check each item off this list to ensure you're ready to bring your best, camera-ready, must-hire self.
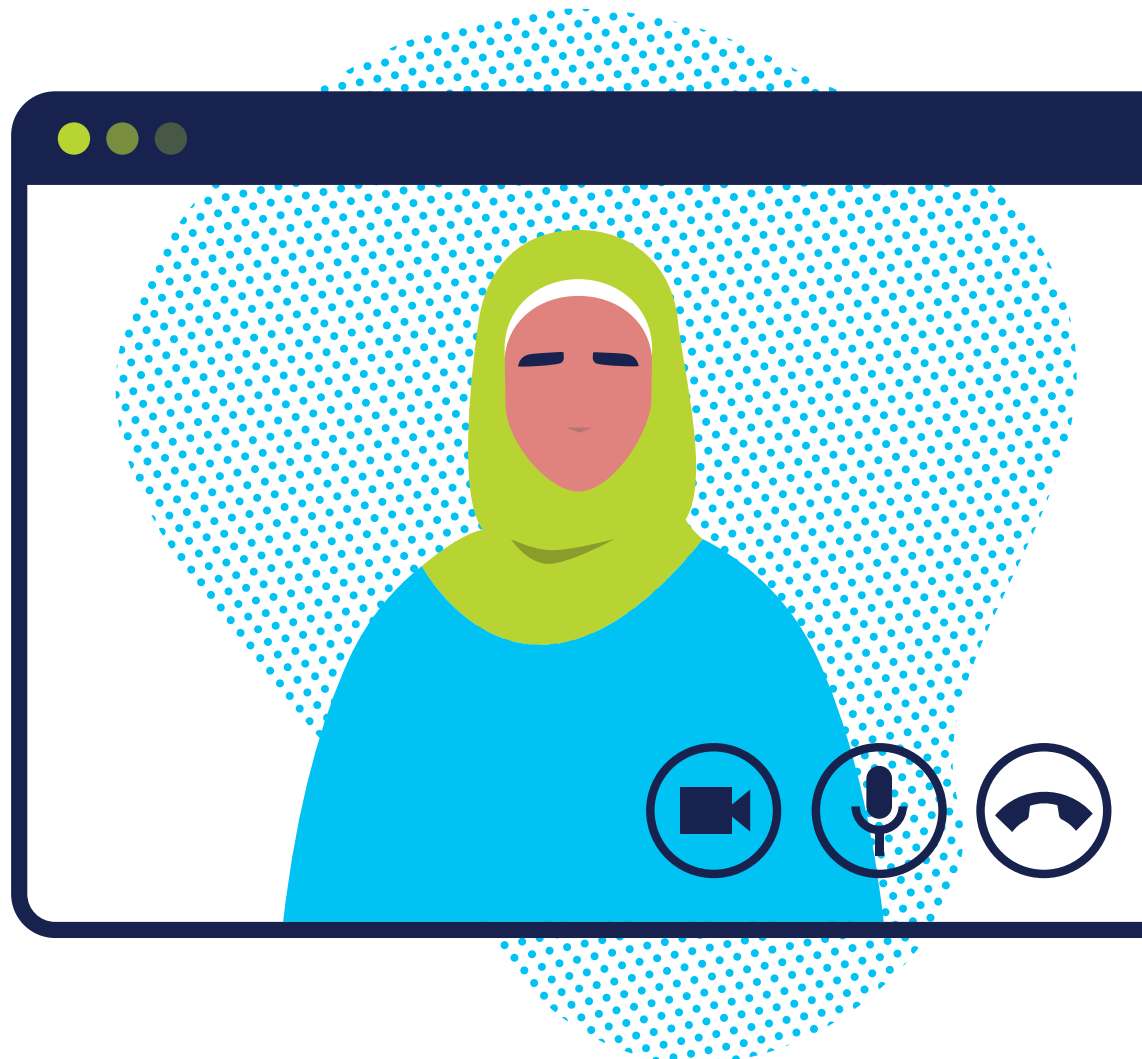
Set aside a dedicated location

Not everyone has the space for a separate home office. But a table in a bedroom or family room, combined with a set of noise-cancelling headphones, can do the trick. However large or small the space, make sure it's set up specifically for your work or learning experience—so you can focus without interruption when you need to.

Get the right equipment

At minimum, you will need a laptop for remote work. If you don't have a computer that's up to the task (with videoconferencing capabilities), it might be time to invest in a new one. The good news is many companies provide military discounts on computer hardware.

Create a functional workspace

It's important to make your desk area both functional and comfortable, since you may be spending hours at a time there. To boost ergonomics, consider adding an external monitor, keyboard, and mouse to your computer setup—and upgrading to a desk chair that provides good back support. And since videoconferencing is the new normal, take account of your surroundings. If you don't have a neutral background, consider using virtual backgrounds available within popular videoconferencing apps.

Practice open communication

We all know how difficult it can be to balance work and family responsibilities—especially when everyone is at home and school is virtual. It helps to keep open communication with other members of your household; let them know when you have a job interview or a call. And if you have children attending school online, consider setting a timer for them to focus on schoolwork (without impeding your job search work).

Put yourself in a remote work or learning mindset

If you're waiting for your training program to start, developing or honing skills can be a useful tool to get you into the mindset for virtual learning and work. The smoothest path is to set aside weekly time to make incremental progress. If you haven't applied for MSSA yet, you can use that time to complete and submit that paperwork. Be sure to visit the Microsoft Military Affairs Education portal for additional resources.

Simple tips to build a resume that stands out

In most situations, your resume will be the first impression you make with recruiters, so it needs to leap out. Here are some basic tips to make your resume shine.
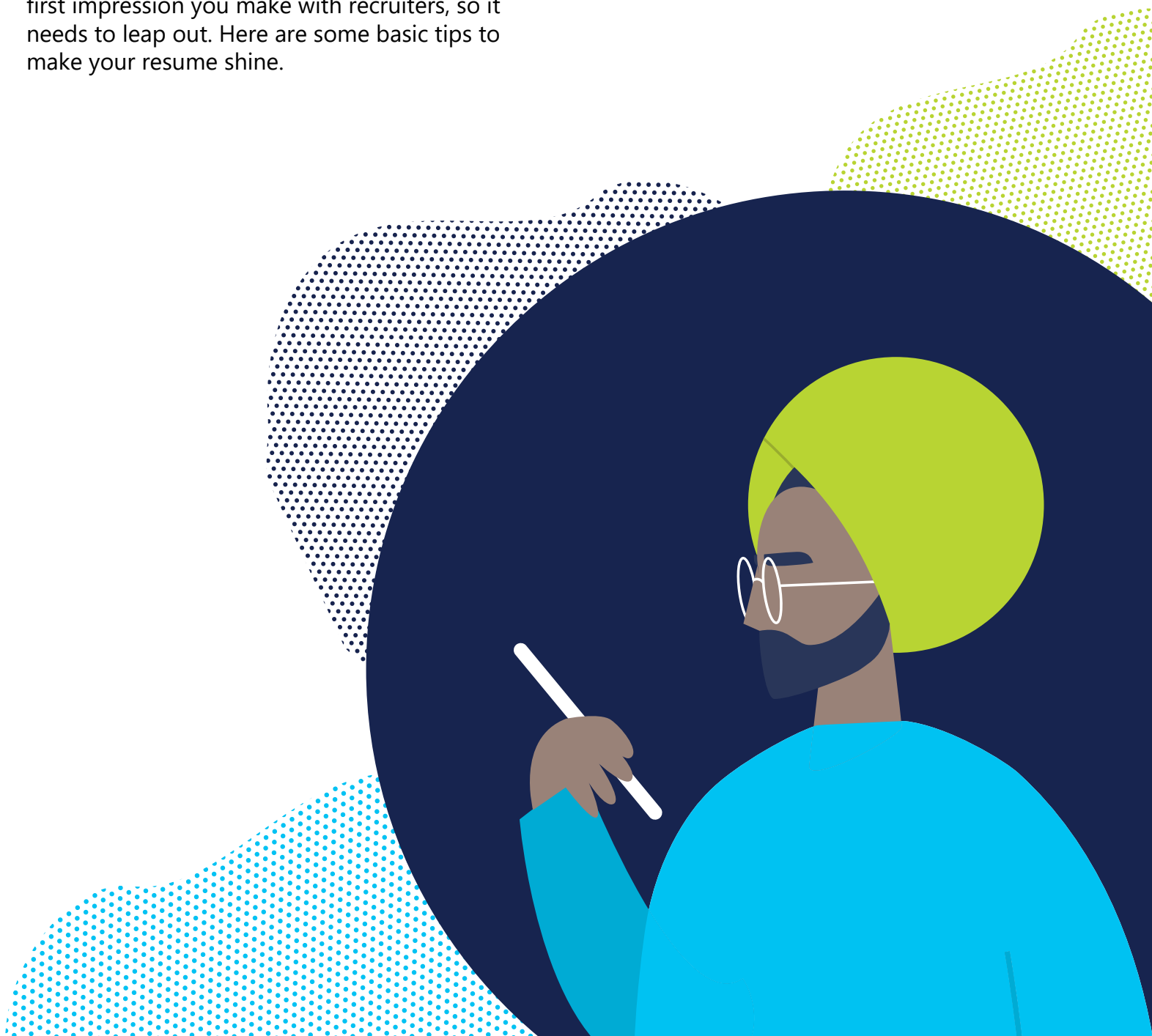
> Tailor it

Applying to new positions is hard work—sometimes it can feel like a full-time job in itself. But as tempting as it may be to create a one-size-fits-all resume, to really stand out from the crowd, take the time to tailor the "experience" section to be relevant to each job you apply for.

> Be concise

If you're near the beginning or approaching the midpoint of your career, it's a good idea to limit your resume to a single page. Still, you should customize your cuts and focus points based on the job you're applying for. And for further help prioritizing what to spotlight, resume workshops through programs like MSSA can help you customize the way you crystallize your expertise for each opportunity at hand.

> Use professional formatting

Microsoft Word has many resume templates you can take advantage of, and it's a good idea to stick with one of these. It may seem fun to play around with fonts and sizes, colors, or margins—but unless you're a designer, employing a templated style will help you look more professional.

> List relevant information

It's crucial to tout volunteer and other off-work activities to give hiring managers a sense of your values and personality. But take care to pinpoint your top hobbies and personal passion areas—to be sure your resume gives an evocative sense of yourself without feeling like a laundry list. And don't neglect to include pastimes you'd be proud to discuss in an interview, and that accrue to your desired career.

> Proofread repeatedly

You should proofread your resume multiple times for typos and errors. A spelling checker is your friend, but if you can, have someone else look over it as well. It's hard for us to catch our own mistakes, but the smallest typos can lead a hiring manager to dismiss your resume. In hiring—and the tech industry in general—grammar hygiene will take you further than you may think.

Know your tech lingo

Every profession has its own terminology. Chances are, as you build your new career, you'll soon come across words and phrases that don't quite mean what you're used to. We spoke with recent MSSA grads to find out which commonly used acronyms from the military mean very different things in tech.

	Military		Tech

Military → Tech

OS
Operations Specialist > **Operating System**
The building blocks of any device: Windows, Android, iOS, or Linux.

AD
Active Duty > **Active Directory**
A set of processes and services for Windows operating systems.

FTE
Failure to Extract or Eject > **Full-Time Employee**
In other words, not a contractor.

MRE
Meals Ready to Eat > **Mixed-Reality Experience**
An interactive blend of digital and physical objects.

RFA
Restrictive Fire Area > **Remote File Access**
The ability to access your digital files at any time, from any place.

EAS
End of Active Service > **Enterprise Application Suite**
The software and tools provided by your company so you can do your job.

SAAS
Standard Army Ammunition System > **Software as a Service**
*Subscriptions or licenses for an organization to access software.*

Go further

Microsoft Military Affairs is here to give you the practical advice you need to keep up your pursuit to begin a rewarding career in technology. If you're interested in learning more about how to maximize your job search efforts—and how to best apply your military skills to a career in tech—consider enrolling in MSSA. The program offers in-depth technical training in either Cloud Application Development or Server and Cloud Administration, plus soft skills guidance for how to stand out during your job hunt.

Learn more about Microsoft Software and Systems Academy at **aka.ms/MSSA**.
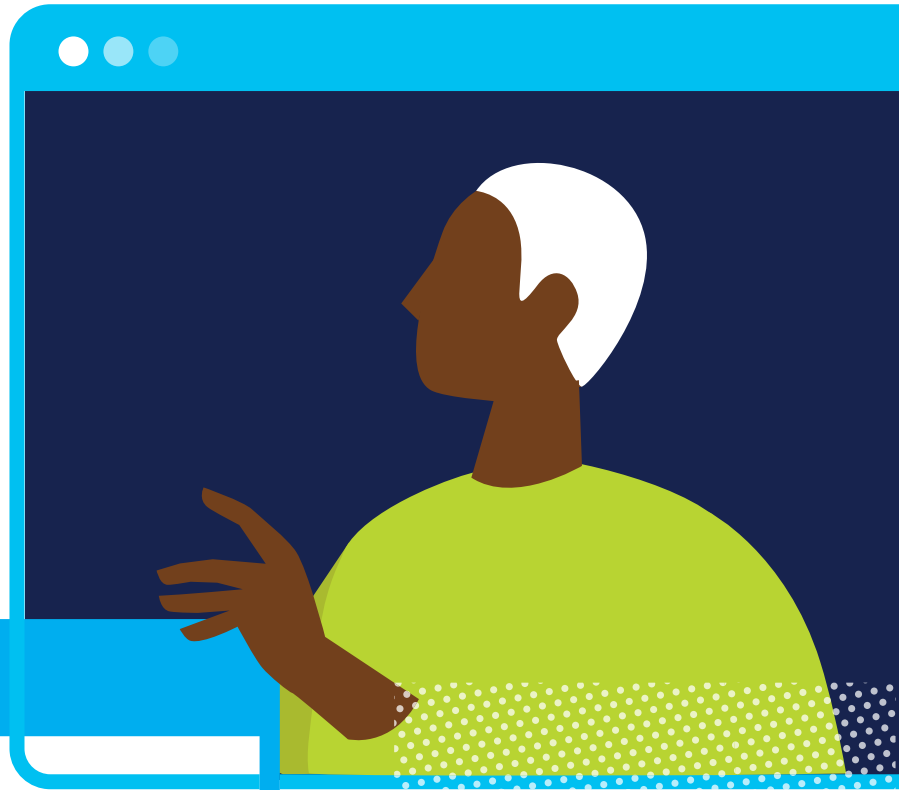
Additional resources

Microsoft Software and Systems Academy
https://military.microsoft.com/programs/microsoft-software-systems-academy

Microsoft Military Affairs Education Portal
www.miledu.microsoft.com/

Free LinkedIn Premium membership
www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/14803/linkedin-for-veterans-free-premium-career-subscription-and-eligibility

Microsoft Store Military Discount
www.microsoft.com/en-us/store/b/military

Veteran Mentor Network
www.linkedin.com/company/veteran-mentor-network/

Why professional networking is so important
www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-professional-networking-so-important-jordan-parikh/

What is a personal elevator pitch?
https://www.linkedin.com/business/learning/blog/productivity-tips/why-you-should-have-a-personal-elevator-pitch-and-how-to-do-it

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