



**EMPLOYMENT
RESEARCH**

THE FORCE BEHIND THE FORCE:

Training, Leveraging, and Communicating about Military Spouses as Employees



TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS BRIEF	1
INTRODUCTION	2
ABOUT THE EMPLOYING MILITARY SPOUSES SERIES	3
UNDERSTANDING MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT: Becoming a Culturally Competent Employer.....	4
EMPLOYING THE FORCE BEHIND THE FORCE: Train, Leverage, Communicate	5
TRAIN	6
Why Do Military Spouses Want to Work?	7
Case Profiles of Successful Military Spouses Balancing Employment, Service, and Family.....	8
Military Spouse Employment Infographic	9
Myth vs. Fact: Biases About Military Spouse Employment	10
Military Spouse Resumes	11
Military Spouse Hiring: The Do's	12
Military Spouse Hiring: The Don'ts	13
Military Spouse Employment: Resources for HR Hiring Managers	14
LEVERAGE	15
Military Spouse Employment is a Top Issue for Active Duty Spouses and Service Members.....	16
Why Hire Military Spouses? The Business Case	17
Determine Your Business Specific Business Case for Hiring Leverage Military Spouses.....	18
Hiring Goals: Questions to Consider	19
Military Spouse Underemployment	20
Assessing Military Spouse Job Candidates	21
COMMUNICATE	22
How Can Employers Source Military Spouse Candidates?	23
Sample Interview Questions for Military Spouse Candidates	24
Barriers to Hiring and Retaining Military Spouse Candidates: Views from Employers.....	25
Best Practices in Hiring Military Spouses: Being a Military Friendly Employer	26
Employing Military Spouses: Beyond Hiring.....	27
SUMMARY.....	28
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS AND HIRING MANAGERS	29
FOR QUESTIONS OR INFORMATION ABOUT THIS SERIES	30



HOW TO USE THIS BRIEF

Before reviewing these slides, we recommend that you download and read the two products that preceded this training slide deck.



PAPER 1: The Force Behind the Force: A Business Case for Leveraging Military Spouse Employment

<https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/article/the-force-behind-the-force-a-business-case-for-leveraging-military-spouse-talent-full-report/>



PAPER 2: The Force Behind the Force: Case Profiles of Successful Military Spouses Balancing Employment, Service, and Family

<https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/article/the-force-behind-the-force-case-profiles-of-successful-military-spouses-balancing-employment-service-and-family/>

This series is designed for interested companies to achieve their hiring goals and to:

- ✓ Identify some of the common challenges faced by military spouses and increase understanding among HR professionals and hiring managers who wish to include military spouses as part of their overall hiring strategies
- ✓ Show how military spouse strengths can be leveraged in the workplace. Identify how military spouse resumes are impacted by the military lifestyle and provide guidance to businesses as to how to assess military spouse job candidates
- ✓ Communicate pragmatic suggestions on how corporations can include military spouses as part of their overall diversity strategies for recruiting, hiring, and retaining military spouse employees.

DISCLAIMER: This slide deck marks the third in a series of hands-on products geared to human resource professionals, hiring managers, C-Suite executives, philanthropists, and nonprofit leaders interested in hiring military spouses. The training product was developed by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), as part of its broader employment research efforts, and with the generous financial support and collaboration of Prudential Financial, Inc. The slides and notes are not intended to be edited or altered in any way.

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Bradbard, D.A., Maury, R., & Armstrong, N.A. (2016, December). The Force Behind the Force: Training, Leveraging, and Communicating about Military Spouses as Employees (Employing Military Spouses). Syracuse, NY: Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University.



INTRODUCTION



ABOUT THE EMPLOYING MILITARY SPOUSES SERIES

This training product is the third in a series of three and is a collaborative effort between the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) and Prudential Financial, Inc.



In addition to these training materials, the series also includes

- ① A Business Case for Hiring Military Spouses, and
- ② Case Studies of eight successful military spouses.

This series illustrates the unique strengths and challenges that military spouses bring to the workforce while supporting their service member's military career.

A significant and growing number of employers are actively including military spouses as part of their diversity and inclusion strategies alongside—and in some cases distinct from—commitments to hire service members and veterans.

This series is designed to help those and other interested companies achieve their hiring goals by leveraging the unique strengths that military spouses bring to the workplace.



UNDERSTANDING MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT: Becoming a Culturally Competent Employer



PHOTO CREDIT: Stephanie Hime-Nelson

What is military cultural competence?

- ✓ Understanding the military lifestyle and its impact on military spouse employment
- ✓ Understanding how the military lifestyle impacts military spouse resumes and their appearance
- ✓ Understanding how to evaluate military spouse candidates
- ✓ Understanding what resources are available to assist employers hiring military spouses



EMPLOYING THE FORCE BEHIND THE FORCE:

Train, Leverage, Communicate



TRAIN

- To increase understanding of the assets military spouses bring to the workplace
- To increase cultural competence surrounding the challenges military spouses face when entering the workforce



LEVERAGE

- Strategies for sourcing and retaining military spouse employees
- Best practices in employing military spouses
- Alternatives to hiring military spouses such as mentoring, networking, or volunteering
- Resources for employers, hiring managers, and human resource professionals to assist with military spouse hiring efforts



COMMUNICATE

- Your business case for hiring military spouses
- How the military lifestyle impacts military spouses and how they convey their experiences on their resumes
- Facts and address myths about military spouses
- Alternative ways of assessing military spouse candidates
- About remote, flexible, or telecommute positions and job openings



TRAIN



WHY DO MILITARY SPOUSES WANT TO WORK?



- ✔ Contribute to the family finances
- ✔ For financial security
- ✔ For economic opportunity
- ✔ Financial independence
- ✔ To accrue benefits such as savings and retirement
- ✔ For well-being
- ✔ For employment continuity
- ✔ To pay off general and student loan debt
- ✔ For social support
- ✔ To connect to their community

CASE PROFILES OF SUCCESSFUL MILITARY SPOUSES BALANCING EMPLOYMENT, SERVICE, AND FAMILY



[Work] gave me my spirit back. It gave me a job outlet that I craved. I did great things for the shop. I increased revenue and increased the programs. It was a great experience, and the people there were family.”



Having employment has helped us financially get back on track.”



The longest I've held a job at the same company is four years. It's a bitter pill to swallow. I don't feel like I've had a career, I've just had a lot of jobs. If we'd had a more stable life, I might not have moved from job to job.”



The reality is that I have been unable to progress because of limited time on [the job]. I haven't had a chance to grow in the company. They always bring you in on some kooky thing you have a talent for, not for a growth position. They don't want to invest time.



I was offered a position that was extremely compatible with my career goals and made the decision to move eight months before my husband. At the time I felt the urge to take the job. It was aligned with my skillsets, the pay was good, and it had been hard to get a job. I knew if I didn't do it I would regret it.”



66%

MILITARY SPOUSES

Report they are either working or looking for work

23%

MILITARY SPOUSES

Are unemployed

3%

MILITARY SPOUSES

Are not in the labor force because they do not want to work

20.7
WEEKS

Average time unemployed military spouses have been looking for work

27
WEEKS

Is considered long-term unemployment



84%

Have some college education

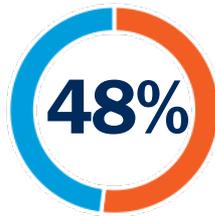
25%

Have a bachelor's degree

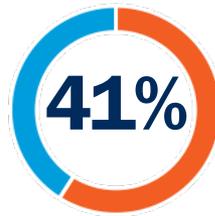
10%

Have graduate or advanced degrees

FAMILIES WITH 2 ADULT EARNERS



CIVILIAN FAMILIES



MILITARY FAMILIES

56%

MILITARY SPOUSES

Report they are working in the area of their education and training



The average time for active duty families at each location

3-4
YEARS

The average time female workers stay in the same job

4
YEARS

68% of military spouses report volunteering

Military spouses volunteer in the community as a strategy to:

- Maintain continuity on their resumes
- Network or socialize
- Contribute to their community
- Develop or use workforce skills





MYTH VS. FACT: BIASES ABOUT MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT



MYTH Military spouses are not educated

FACT 85% have some college coursework
25% have a bachelors degree
10% have an advanced degree

MYTH Military spouses do not want or need to work

FACT 66% of military spouses are either working or looking for work; 23-26% of military spouses are unemployed

MYTH Military spouses don't have job experience

FACT Military spouses may have extensive job experience, but their experiences may not be consecutive or linear

MYTH Military spouses move frequently

FACT Military families move every 3-4 years. Paradoxically, the employment challenges military spouses face, may, in fact, engender loyalty to the employer, which may encourage spouses to remain with a company if a job transfer or remote employment are allowed.

MYTH Military spouses have employment gaps in their resumes because they lack commitment and skills

FACT Employers should not automatically misperceive resume gaps to be skill or experience deficiencies, when, in actuality, spouses may be actively seeking additional training, credentialing, certifications, or volunteer work that enhance their skills.



A strong resume clearly conveys a work history that aligns with a particular job description and level of experience. A resume is often the difference between a candidate being in the “yes” or “no” pile of applicants. But military spouses may have trouble demonstrating they are a good fit through their resume alone. Military spouse resumes often have many short-term positions instead of a solid string of long-term positions. Some military spouses may also have gaps in their employment histories, volunteer experiences in lieu of paid positions, or positions that appear disconnected.

COMMON FEATURES OF MILITARY SPOUSE RESUMES:

- Functional vs. chronological resumes
- Gaps in education or employment; Incomplete education or prolonged time in school, attendance at multiple schools, or multiple degrees
- A history of employment in disparate or unrelated jobs
- Employment that is unrelated to educational background or level of education
- More volunteer rather than paid work experience(s)
- Short duration jobs
- Underemployment
- Part-time jobs vs. full-time jobs or temporary work
- Certifications in lieu of education
- Long-term unemployment
- Unclear demonstration of advancement or increasing responsibilities over time



MILITARY SPOUSE HIRING: THE DO'S

- ✔ Encourage military spouse candidates to apply using specific language, direct internet links, and through social media. Also, develop promotional material specific to military spouse candidates.
- ✔ Educate human resource employees and hiring managers on military spouse candidates, how their resumes are likely to appear, the business case for hiring them, and some of the challenges they face with regard to employment.
- ✔ Adapt the business case for hiring military spouses to your own business so that the specific attributes that contribute to your hiring efforts are clearly defined.
- ✔ Evaluate candidates on their credentials and job suitability versus assuming they will not commit to long-term employment.
- ✔ Use expedited hiring practices to move qualified spouses into positions to maximize their talent, their time at a given location, and to maximize opportunities for training, mentoring, and advancement.
- ✔ Leverage capabilities for remote, telework, or flexible employment arrangements.
- ✔ Ensure that job descriptions on career websites reflect when remote work, alternate work arrangements, or accommodations are available for a given role.
- ✔ Train hiring managers on the value that military spouses bring to the workforce.
- ✔ Encourage open communication about candidate interests, skills, and abilities to provide opportunities to highlight experiences and characteristics not conveyed via the resume.
- ✔ Understand how the military lifestyle impacts what is included on military spouse resumes. Use multiple assessment tools to evaluate military spouse candidates including personal references, in-person interviews, and questions that allow candidates to highlight job-relevant attributes or skills that may not appear on their resume.



MILITARY SPOUSE HIRING: THE DON'TS

- ⊗ Assume military spouses will self-identify. Military spouse job candidates may have concerns that they will not be hired if they disclose their military spouse status. A separate landing page or application process for military spouse applicants can help recruiters and hiring managers identify military spouse applicants.
- ⊗ Assume that hiring managers understand or have knowledge about the military or how the military lifestyle impacts military spouse job applications.
- ⊗ Rely on resumes alone to identify business specific characteristics for military spouse candidates.
- ⊗ Assume all military spouse employees will be short-term employees. The average time for active duty families at each location is three to four years, compared to the average female worker who stays in the same job for an average of four years.
- ⊗ Assume that gaps in employment, multiple jobs, non-linear career paths, or underemployment reflect a deficit.
- ⊗ Rule out contract (1099) or temporary employment options as a way to “test” new remote employment situations or as a means to hire military spouses for short-term or contract positions.
- ⊗ Make assumptions about length of time, pay expectations, resume gaps or periods of unemployment without discussing with a potential job candidate. Where possible, focus on transferable skills and the ability to adapt and learn as opposed to specific job skills.
- ⊗ Assume that gaps reflect a deficit. Speak to job candidates and their references; ask for clarification about resume gaps or their career paths (e.g., what did you do during your time when you were not employed?). Military spouse candidates may apply for positions that appear unrelated to their background or prior experience. Their transferable skills may become apparent—even an asset—upon further examination.



MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT: RESOURCES FOR HR HIRING MANAGERS



- ✔ **Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP)**
- ✔ **Chamber of Commerce Hiring our Heroes Initiative**
- ✔ **Child Care Aware for Military Families**
<http://usa.childcareaware.org/military-programs/>
- ✔ **Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR)**
<http://www.esgr.mil/Service-Members-Family/How-ESGR-Can-Help.aspx>
- ✔ **Employer Best Practices for Workers with Caregiving Responsibilities**
<https://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/caregiver-best-practices.html>
- ✔ **Hiring Veterans and Military Spouses: A Workbook for Employers**
<http://www.employerroadmap.org/contentUpload/employer-workbook.pdf>
- ✔ **The Military Spouse eMentor program**
<https://www.ementorprogram.org/about/>
- ✔ **Veteran Career Transition Program (VCTP)**
<https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/veteran-and-family-resources/career-training/vctp/>



LEVERAGE



KEY SKILLS

- ✓ Communication skills
- ✓ Persistence
- ✓ Adaptability
- ✓ Perseverance
- ✓ Initiative
- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Ability to perform in multiple roles

In 2016, the Department of Defense reported that 66% of military spouses were in the labor force, either working or seeking employment.

Unemployed spouses had been looking for work an average of 20.7 weeks (about 5 months).

For the past six years, active duty military spouses have reported employment as one of their top concerns.

WHY HIRE MILITARY SPOUSES?



The Business Case

Resilient Military spouses face challenges including family separations, frequent relocation, separation from friends and family, and difficulty finding employment or finishing their education. Yet, despite juggling multiple responsibilities, they report better coping than the average civilian.

Team-Oriented

Military support infrastructure largely depends on at-home spouses relying on one another through social activities, help with childcare, and overall social support.

Adaptable

Military families live with consistent uncertainty. Deployments often occur without warning; families may be asked to move without notice; and benefits and allowances frequently change unexpectedly. Despite these challenges, 68% of active duty spouses say they are satisfied with the military way of life.

CIVICALLY ENGAGED

Blue Star Families, in their 2014 survey of military families, found that 68% of their respondents reported that they had either formally or informally volunteered in the past year—significantly higher than the 21.8% of the general public who formally volunteered with an organization in 2015 as reported by the Department of Labor.

DIVERSE

The active duty military spouse community has a larger proportion of ethnic and racial minorities as compared to the broader civilian population.

Entrepreneurial

28% of military spouse respondents have either been self-employed or operated their own business, and 34% indicated they had an interest in online or work-from-home opportunities.

Resourceful

Military spouses are often learning to use the resources they have available to them, and they create unique and innovative solutions to problems despite obstacles or challenges.

EDUCATED

- 84% have some college education or higher
- 25% have a bachelor's degree
- 10% have an advanced degree

Socially Aware

Military spouses often interact with a variety of people of different cultures, backgrounds, ages, and ethnicities. The military exposes spouses to a variety of cross-cultural and social experiences, and interactions with VIPs and the press. Military spouses understand norms around operational security and safety.

MULTI-TASKERS

In a study of over 6,200 military spouses, despite juggling multiple responsibilities, 75% reported feeling confident in their ability to handle problems.



WHAT IS THE BUSINESS CASE?

The business case captures the reasoning for initiating a project or task. It is the information needed for authorization of the project.

HAVING A BUSINESS CASE FOR HIRING MILITARY SPOUSES IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE:

- ✓ HR and hiring managers need to understand the business reasons behind military spouse hiring in order to source, recruit, and retain candidates
- ✓ It helps to identify the types of positions military spouses are best suited for within the company
- ✓ It defines how hiring military spouses is likely to benefit the business
- ✓ It helps determine what steps can and cannot be taken to source, recruit and retain military spouse candidates



HIRING GOALS: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How many spouse can you hire?
- What kind of positions will you hire for?
- Do you have remote, telecommute, or telework positions?
- Are there certain locations that are more likely to work for spouses than others?
- Have you developed or cultivated relationships with the military community?
- Are your goals for hiring military spouses distinct from your goals for hiring veterans?
- How will job seekers know you are interested in hiring them?
- Is there a mechanism for military spouses to self identify?
- How will you assess or evaluate your military spouse job candidate?





Military spouses are often underemployed meaning they hold jobs that are not consistent with their level of education or experience. Or they may work part-time when they would prefer full-time work.

When spouses were interviewed, each described periods of being underemployed. They each described times where they accepted positions for which they were more qualified or capable of doing more, sometimes taking salary cuts to:

- ① maintain work-life balance;
- ② remain in the workplace;
- ③ contribute to family expenses; or
- ④ maintain a sense of self- esteem (social life, networking, making a contribution).

Military spouses often describe frustration with periods of underemployment and as a compromise to balance their own career desires, their service member's career, and their family responsibilities. They also described challenges such as access, availability, and cost of childcare that contributed to their underemployment.

Companies looking to hire military spouses need to be aware of key circumstances impacting military spouses and their employment histories to assess whether a military spouse candidate is a “good fit,” thus, matching the resume with the job-specific qualifications. For example:

- Resumes may not accurately reflect the breadth of experiences that military spouses brings to the workplace.
- Interviews may better reflect the “soft skills” that are not reflected on a resume, but could be observed in person, by speaking with references, or simply by asking candidates to talk about the experiences that qualify them for a job.
- Enabling spouses to self-identify may also provide an opportunity for an open dialogue about any concerns that the employer or prospective employee may have. However, be mindful that candidates may be reluctant to self-identify due to concerns about stereotypes (e.g., relocation).



HR CAN:

- ✓ Interview candidates
- ✓ Speak with references
- ✓ Ask candidates to talk about the experiences that qualify them for a job
- ✓ Enable spouses to self-identify to encourage dialogue about mutual expectations



COMMUNICATE

HOW CAN EMPLOYERS SOURCE MILITARY SPOUSE CANDIDATES?

- ✔ Set up informal meetings to talk with veterans and/or spouses in your company about their experiences, what they value in an employer and how to locate interested potential hires
- ✔ Consider hosting or planning an event specifically for military spouses
- ✔ Use your personal network
- ✔ Use social media such as LinkedIn and Facebook
- ✔ Talk to companies who are willing to share their experiences with hiring military spouses and seek their input
- ✔ Clearly identify your interest in hiring military spouses in website, print, or social media materials
- ✔ Identify positions that you believe are a good fit for military spouse candidates
- ✔ Note when positions are remote or telework positions



The traditional resume and application process may put military spouse job candidates at a disadvantage or eliminate them from consideration before they have had a chance to compete.



SOME SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO ASK MILITARY SPOUSES MIGHT INCLUDE:

- Tell me about some of your experiences that are not included on your resume?
- What attributes make you a good fit for this position?
- What are your career goals?
- What do you think you bring to the company?



BARRIERS TO HIRING AND RETAINING MILITARY SPOUSE CANDIDATES: VIEWS FROM EMPLOYERS



- ✔ Self-identification
- ✔ Deployment
- ✔ Parenting and childcare conflicts
- ✔ Unable to offer remote opportunities
- ✔ Recent experience or credentialing gaps
- ✔ Difficulty differentiating between veteran and military spouse hiring initiatives
- ✔ Relocation and turnover

BEST PRACTICES IN HIRING MILITARY SPOUSES: BEING A MILITARY FRIENDLY EMPLOYER

- ✔ Become culturally competent
- ✔ Avoid stigma or assumptions
- ✔ Provide “high touch” assessment of military spouse candidates
- ✔ Have a strategic plan and business case specific to your company and garner support for it
- ✔ Develop relationships in your community to establish relationships with military spouses that are needed
- ✔ Participate in coalitions to share best practices, identify effective approaches, and remove barriers
- ✔ Show you are a military friendly employer in your promotional materials
- ✔ Dedicate resources to your hiring efforts
- ✔ Have a process for self-identification
- ✔ Provide support through affinity groups, existing resources, or through newly developed resources
- ✔ Provide feedback, mentorship, and training where needed





EMPLOYERS CAN SUPPORT MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT EFFORTS THROUGH:

- Sponsor training programs and workshops to prepare military spouses for the workforce
- Sponsor research efforts to learn about best practices around military spouse hiring
- Participate in collaboration with other employers to share best practices
- Develop promotional material that identifies your business as a military spouse friendly employer
- Enable opportunities for spouses to speak directly to hiring managers
- Mentor and encourage others to mentor military spouses





SUMMARY



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS AND HIRING MANAGERS



TRAIN

- Consider **providing training** to your HR professionals and hiring managers to help them understand how to review military spouse resumes
- Do not assume that spouses will be unable to continue in a job for only a short period of time
- Establish a **resource list** to connect military spouse employees with local childcare providers to enable seamless work starts
- Provide **mentorship** opportunities for spouses returning to the workplace
- Don't assume that someone is or isn't appropriate for a particular job due to their age or prior experience (e.g., they are applying to a job they are overqualified for)



LEVERAGE

- Existing hiring efforts, but recognize military spouse hiring efforts may differ from veteran hiring efforts; connect with existing military employees and seek their input
- The business case and identify your own business-specific reasons for hiring military spouses
- Self-identification by developing materials that promote their interest in hiring military spouses, thus sending the message that spouses will not be penalized for doing so. This increases the chances that employers and prospective employees can communicate with one another about their mutual expectations.
- Networking groups on social media, on LinkedIn, with nonprofit groups, and with military spouse employees to determine how to attract military spouse candidates



COMMUNICATE

- About employment options. Consider **contract (1099) employment** options as well as traditional employment
- Consider **telework** opportunities where appropriate and for appropriate employees
- **About position openings** to determine if they can be offered as remote or flex time positions for military spouse candidates
- About existing benefits to **enable flexibility** for military spouse employees (e.g., pooling unused sick leave hours to be used for spouse(s) with a service members' deployment)
- About benefits that might appeal to military spouse candidates or offering **flexible benefit packages** that reflect the needs of military spouse employees (e.g., childcare credits in lieu of paying healthcare expenses)



THE FORCE BEHIND THE FORCE:

Training, Leveraging, and Communicating about Military Spouses as Employees

FOR QUESTIONS OR INFORMATION ABOUT THIS SERIES:

Deborah A. Bradbard, Ph.D. | Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)
Senior Research Associate
dbradbar@syr.edu

Nicholas J. Armstrong, Ph.D.
Senior Director, Research and Policy | Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)
narmstro@syr.edu

James Beamesderfer
Vice President, Veterans Initiatives | Prudential
james.beamesderfer@prudential.com

To download the reports and check for updates on the Employing Military Spouses Series go to:
vets.syr.edu/employingmilitaryspouses



About The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)

The IVMF is the first interdisciplinary national institute in higher education focused on the social, economic, education, and policy issues impacting veterans and their families post-service. Through the focus on veterans programming, research and policy, employment and employer support, and community engagement, the Institute provides in-depth analysis of the challenges facing the veteran community, captures best practices, and serves as a forum to facilitate new partnerships and strong relationships between the individuals and organizations committed to making a difference for veterans and military families.



About Prudential Financial, Inc.

Prudential Financial, Inc. (NYSE: PRU), a financial services leader with more than \$1 trillion of assets under management as of March 31, 2016, has operations in the United States, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Prudential's diverse and talented employees are committed to helping individual and institutional customers grow and protect their wealth through a variety of products and services, including life insurance, annuities, retirement-related services, mutual funds and investment management. In the U.S., Prudential's iconic Rock symbol has stood for strength, stability, expertise and innovation for more than a century. For more information, please visit www.news.prudential.com.