

Resource guide: Entering skilled trades and elevator work as a veteran

Why skilled trades?

Skilled trades are recession-resilient, in-demand, and offer high income potential without a traditional four-year degree. For veterans, they also provide:

- Tangible results and mission-focused work
- Transferable military skills (logistics, repair, systems knowledge)
- Opportunities for apprenticeships and licensure funded through the GI Bill or SkillBridge

Pathway to becoming an elevator technician

What elevator mechanics do: Elevator mechanics install, maintain, and repair elevators, escalators, chairlifts, and similar machinery. It's a high-stakes role due to safety regulations, and it offers top-tier compensation due to its niche technical expertise.

Typical career path

1. Pre-apprenticeship or introductory courses
 - Basic electrical, mechanical and math skills are essential.
 - Start with vocational high school programs or community college technical training.
2. **Apprenticeship (4–5 years)**
 - Most states require apprenticeships registered with state licensing boards or unions.
 - The International Union of Elevator Constructors is a primary resource and industry standard. Local chapters sponsor apprenticeships, offering paid, hands-on experience with classroom instruction.
3. **Licensing and certification**
 - After 4-5 Years and varying OTJ hours apprentices can test for their Mechanics License.
 - OSHA 10/30, CPR and electrical safety certifications are often offered and/or required.
4. **Business ownership**

- After 10-plus years of field experience, some mechanics launch their own maintenance and installation companies like Mack Brothers Elevator.

Associations and resources

- IUEC
- National Elevator Industry Educational Program
- National Association of Elevator Contractors

Other popular trade career paths for veterans

Trade	Average Salary	Certification Needed?	VA-Approved?
HVAC Tech	\$50,000–\$80,000	EPA + local licenses	✓
Electrician	\$55,000–\$100,000	Journeyman/Master	✓
Welder	\$45,000–\$90,000	AWS Certification	✓
General contractor	\$60,000+	Business license + exams	✓
Plumbing	\$50,000–\$95,000	Journeyman/Master	✓

Electricians

- **Path:** Apprenticeship → Journeyman → Master Electrician
- **Certifications:** NEC code knowledge, state licenses
- **Associations:** IEC and NECA

HVAC technicians

- **Path:** Trade school or apprenticeship → EPA 608 Certification → Licensing
- **Certifications:** NATE and HVAC Excellence
- **Associations:** ACCA and RSES

Plumbers and pipefitters

- **Path:** Apprenticeship (through UA locals) → Licensing by state
- **Certifications:** Journeyman → Master Plumber

- **Associations:** UA - United Association

Welders

- **Path:** Trade school or apprenticeship → AWS certification
- **Certifications:** AWS D1.1 and more, depending on specialty
- **Associations:** American Welding Society

Other trade training and support resources

Veteran-focused programs

- **Helmets to hardhats:** Connects veterans to union construction careers.
- **SkillBridge:** Allows active-duty members to intern in skilled trades.
- **Home Builders Institute:** Offers veteran-specific training in plumbing, carpentry and electrical.

Incubators and mentorship

- **Veterans in Piping:** Pre-apprenticeship programs for transitioning servicemembers.
- **Vets2Techs:** Veterans interested oil and propane industry companies.

Certifying bodies

- National Elevator Industry Educational Program
- National Association of Elevator Contractors
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA): 10/30-hour safety certifications often required.

Niche tips for intermediate trades entrepreneurs

- **Bid strategy:** Learn local procurement codes and MBE/VOSB certifications.
- **Workforce development:** Build pipelines by partnering with local high schools or vet organizations.
- **Liability insurance:** Required in most trades; plan early.
- **Inventory control:** Fabrication-based trades benefit from ERP or custom tracking systems.

- **Compliance audits:** Set reminders for OSHA/safety updates and state inspections.