



SERVING OUR POST-9/11 VETERANS

LEADING PRACTICES AMONG NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

PREPARED WITH:
INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF)
Syracuse University



THE BUSH INSTITUTE

AT THE

GEORGE W. BUSH PRESIDENTIAL CENTER

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF) HAS BEEN CONTRACTED TO SUPPORT THE GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE'S RESEARCH TO SERVE AND EMPOWER OUR POST-9/11 VETERANS & MILITARY FAMILIES.

SUMMARY

Today, more than 45,000 non-profit organizations serve U.S. military veterans and their families. Some of these non-profits have long traditions of caring for members of the military, while others are just getting started.

Together, they deliver a broad array of services and support to veterans and their families, ranging from wellness and housing services to employment and educational assistance. As this 'sea of goodwill' evolves and matures, there has been an increasing focus on understanding the means and the mechanisms by which veteran-serving non-profits can become more effective and make greater impact.

This focus stems from the recognition and practical need for non-profit organizations to act as good stewards of philanthropic resources, particularly in the face of an increasingly constrained environment for resources. The focus also comes from the imperative that veteran-serving organizations create the conditions that will institutionalize the delivery of high quality, high-impact services for veterans and their families.

To help meet these objectives, this report highlights findings from an in-depth study of leading service-delivery practices. They represent a sample of veteran-serving, not-for-profit organizations operating in the United States.

The premise is that veteran-serving organizations making the greatest impact are those that are 'effective.' They enact processes and structures to reliably and consistently achieve the outcomes the organization intends to produce.

At the same time, they adapt and customize organizational processes, practices, culture, and models of service-delivery. That allows them to advance the social, economic, and wellness concerns of veterans and their families.

Our purpose is to highlight processes and practices that are uniquely relevant to veterans and their families. We want to inform veterans and military family as consumers and drive a more effective delivery of services and philanthropic giving.

APPROACH

In 2014, the Military Service Initiative (MSI) of the George W. Bush Institute (GWBI) initiated a comprehensive research project to describe the current 'state of knowledge' about the challenges, opportunities, and concerns of post-9/11 veterans and their families. This initial effort took the form of five distinct, but inter-connected research endeavors.

They include a review of academic literature (2007-2013), a review and statistical analysis of population data (2007-2013), a review and content analysis of media reporting (2012-2013), a review and content analysis of philanthropic activity (2003-2013), and a comprehensive, national survey of the nation's most experienced and influential "thought leaders" across the veterans' community (102).

The purpose was to use research and data-driven scholarship to identify ways to, better meet the social, economic, and wellness needs of post-9/11 veterans and their families. This program identified nine themes that research suggests can best serve veterans.

Described and detailed in this report is the second phase of the MSI research, which builds directly from the findings of this first phase and identifies organizational processes and practices that lead to an effective delivery of services.

As part of this research, 25 organizations were selected for case studies. The selection protocol was designed to generate a representative sample of the universe of veteran-serving non-profits. It also was designed to ensure a sufficient degree of variation among the organizations, such as their age, geographic focus and programming initiatives.

The team developed a comparative case study methodology that was both exploratory and descriptive. It was designed to identify and aggregate processes and practices that are aligned with the themes identified in the first phase of the research program.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study confirmed a great deal of conventional wisdom. Most of the themes are important, but some more so than others. Like veterans and families who come from all walks of American society, the findings also reveal a great deal of complexity and nuance.

For example, it is inherently good for an organization to be well-connected at the community level and to bridge the civilian-military divide – but this mattered most for locally-based organizations serving vulnerable groups of veterans.

However, the study also highlighted a deficiency across the space in the assumed necessary conditions for the delivery of services – infrastructure, processes, and practices – which set the conditions upon which veteran-specific expertise adds an additional element of organizational excellence.

Actionable findings and recommendations stemming from this work are detailed throughout the report. A sampling of insights found in multiple cases includes:

- *A great deal of nuance exists in delivering effective services to veterans. Organizations delivering the most impact evolve and learn to customize services to meet the differing needs of veterans.*
- *Rarely are two veteran-serving organizations created equal. There is an incredible degree of diversity across the community of veteran-serving organizations. That is true in their focus, models, and methods.*
- *Funders drive organizational behavior and change. The more sophisticated the funder(s), the more sophisticated the organization.*
- *The community of veteran-serving non-profits remains somewhat immature in their processes, practices, and efficiencies.*
- *Many veteran-serving organizations exhibit a strong pull toward the status quo. They are slow to adapt beyond their traditional ways of serving veterans when the needs of this diverse population may be changing.*
- *Funds often are directed to programs, so it is hard for organizations to invest in innovations that will improve their delivery of services. High program-to-administration expense ratios can hinder investment in improving organizational practices. The study supports the idea that effective veteran-serving organizations enact processes and practices supporting broad-based and ‘traditional’ organizational effectiveness and efficiency outcomes.*

We also learned that the most effective organizations focus on a particular set of veteran issues and concerns. Specifically, these organizations:

- *Create partnerships with complementary providers and collaborate with them in delivering services, and recognize that community-connected relationships are key to a successful transition for veterans. They cultivate those relationships for the veterans they serve.*
- *View funder partnerships as symbiotic and collaborative. They use the expertise of funding partners to improve their own internal processes and systems.*
- *Acknowledge and embrace the inherent differences among veterans. They incorporate those differences into the organization's processes, practices, and delivery of services.*
- *Differentiate their services to support the unique concerns of women veterans, and focus on the whole family as they set up their processes, practices, and delivery of services.*
- *Understand that education and employment are the foundation of a successful transition. They advance educational and vocational opportunities for the veterans they serve.*
- *Understand that the media represents an opportunity to inform Americans about veterans and the organizations that serve them. They inform the media about the realities that veterans face so the media can present a realistic narrative about veterans and the organizations that serve them.*
- *Recognize that the transition from military service to civilian life includes multiple social, economic, and wellness challenges. They focus on the whole person as they deliver services.*

CONTRIBUTION

This study illustrates and provides evidence that can lead to better organizational practices, donor strategies, and knowledge among veterans and their families. Equally important, this evidence should stimulate dialogue and action about how the public, private, and independent sectors might better align so they can have a positive, lasting impact on the social, economic, and wellness needs of veterans and their families.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	i
Approach	i
Findings and Recommendations	ii
Contribution	iii
Table of Contents	iv
I. Introduction	1
Purpose	1
Background and Rationale	1
Organization of the Report	2
II. Study Overview and Approach	3
Approach	9
Analytical Framework	10
Strategic Themes Informing Organizational Efficiency & Effectiveness (2)	11
Strategic Themes Informing Veteran-Focused Service Delivery (9)	12
III. Thematic Analysis and Results	16
Strategic Themes on Organizational Impact	16
Organizational Effectiveness Themes	16
Performance Measurement and Evaluation Themes	22
Strategic Themes on Veteran Focused Service Delivery	26
Community Connectedness Themes	26
Social Connectedness Themes	32
Independent Sector Engagement Themes	38
Veteran Programming Differentiation Themes	41
Women Veteran Themes	49
Family Reintegration Themes	53
Employment and Education Themes	58
Media Engagement Themes	64
Life-Course Transition Themes	67
IV. Findings and Concluding Recommendations	73
Summary	73
Organizational Effectiveness Themes	74
Performance Evaluation and Assessment Themes	74
Community Connectedness Themes	75
Social Connectedness Themes	75
Independent Sector Engagement Themes	76
Veteran Programming Differentiation Themes	76
Women Veteran Themes	77
Family Reintegration Themes	77
Employment and Education Themes	78
Media Engagement Themes	78
Life-Course Transition Themes	79
Appendix A: Overview of Participating Organizations	80
Appendix B: Research Design	87
Case Selection	87
Data Collection	91
Case Analysis	91
Limitations	92
Appendix C. Interview Protocol	90
Appendix D. Guidance for the Preparation of Case Studies	???

I. INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

This report highlights findings from an in-depth study of leading service-delivery practices of 25 veteran and military family serving non-profit organizations (VSNPs)¹ across the United States. The study identifies leading practices uniquely relevant to serving veterans and their families

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

This study is the second research effort in a series, aimed to (1) inform and advance outcomes associated with the social, economic, and wellness concerns of the nation's veterans and their families, and (2) empower veterans and their families to thrive and lead healthy lives as American citizens.

The current study, conducted by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University and commissioned by the George W. Bush Institute, complements a prior multi-disciplinary review of extant research informative of the post-service experience of post-9/11 veterans and their families.² The previous effort represents an extensive evaluation of academic literature, historical data, and philanthropic and media activity, impacting social, economic, and wellness outcomes. Building upon this work – and assuming a similar objective – the purpose of the current study is to identify leading practices uniquely relevant to serving veterans and their families, in a way that informs the efficiency and effectiveness objectives of VSNP service-providers and funders, and also benefits the nation's veterans and their families.

More than 45,000 non-profit organizations serve U.S. military veterans and their families.³ A tangible representation of the American public's support for its servicemembers both prior to and since 9/11, these organizations deliver a wide array of supportive services ranging from employment assistance to temporary housing and financial support. Examples include (but are not limited to):

- *Job fairs, resume writing, and interview preparation*
- *Transition & vocational mentorship*
- *Workforce development & entrepreneurship training*
- *Higher education admissions and campus support, benefits counseling, and scholarships*
- *Transitional, permanent, or adaptive housing assistance*
- *Financial assistance, counseling, and literacy training*
- *Health & wellness services (both clinical, and non-clinical)*
- *Legal services & support*
- *Community connection & engagement*

1 We use the acronym "VSNP" throughout the report to describe non-profit organizations that serve veterans or military family members. The term includes congressionally chartered veteran service organizations, more frequently labeled as "VSOs."

2 Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF). (2014). *Insights Informing the Concerns of Post-9/11 Veterans and Families. Converging Analysis: A Multi-Dimensional Review of the Post-Service Experience*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.

3 GuideStar USA, Inc., January 2014.

Notably, as the list of available services goes on, it's also evident that the number of organizations providing these services to veterans and their families is doubly *vast*. As a consequence, choosing the best organization or program from which to seek assistance – or as a funder, to support philanthropically - can be an overwhelming experience.

Beyond simply navigating the network of non-profit organizations serving veterans and their families, many have suggested that a need exists to better specify the effectiveness and impact of these veteran-serving organizations. It's right and true to suggest that veteran and military family serving organizations fill a critical 'services gap' at the national, regional, and (predominantly) community level. It's also largely true, however, that beyond basic financial information and efficiency benchmarks applied and generalized by non-profit rating organizations,⁴ there is inadequate information available to both donors and consumers (veterans and their families), as to the efficacy and impact of the services provided by veteran-serving organizations – particularly as focused on the long-term social, economic, and wellness concerns of those they serve. Importantly, this information gap has meaningful consequences for all stakeholders to the VSNP community.

In the short-term, unfamiliarity with effectiveness and impact—particularly as possibly unique to the veteran and military community—undermines the marketplace for both services and funding; that is, this situation contributes to poorly informed charitable giving decisions, the perpetuation of ineffectual services, and most importantly, marginalized service-delivery directed toward veterans and their families. This is a situation where the consequences of inaction are not only far-reaching for veterans and their families, but also hold long-term implications for the all-volunteer military and national security.

The foreseeable future will be marked by resource constrained federal budgets, the reasonable likelihood of fading military-friendly charitable giving, and the possibility of a continuously engaged military force operating in an era of persistent conflict. More effective veteran services, driven by informed donors and consumers, are critical to ensure that not only today's veterans and their families thrive, but future generations of Americans continue to view military service as a pathway to leading meaningful, productive lives.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The report is organized into four sections. Following the introduction, section two of the report describes the study's overall approach and analytical framework, detailing 11 key themes related to impactful VSNP service delivery that guide our analysis. The third and primary section provides a detailed analysis of these key themes, as represented across 25 VSNP participants in this study. The fourth and concluding section identifies key findings and recommendations.

4 GuideStar USA, Inc. and Charity Navigator are two examples.

II. STUDY OVERVIEW AND APPROACH

This section introduces the research project broadly including its origins, approach, contextual background, and analytical framework. For additional detail on research methodology, Appendix B includes an in-depth description of the study's research design, to include case selection, data collection, and case analysis procedures.

RESEARCH PROGRAM OVERVIEW

In fall 2013, the Military Service Initiative (MSI) of the George W. Bush Institute (GWBI) initiated a comprehensive research project designed to describe the current 'state of knowledge' of the challenges, opportunities, and concerns represented by the community of post-9/11 veterans and their families. This initial research effort took the form of five distinct, yet interrelated research endeavors. Specifically:

- 1) *A review and systematic analysis of academic literature, published between 2007 and 2013, which was informative of the social, economic, and wellness life-course of post-9/11 veterans and their families. This review aggregated and analyzed findings across 75 published and peer-reviewed research articles, and 122 total cited data sources, in the areas of veteran employment, wellness, family, education, female veterans, and housing.*
- 2) *A review and statistical analysis of population data, representing the period 2007 to 2013, descriptive of the social, economic, and wellness life-course of post-9/11 veterans and their families. This effort took the form of trend and correlation analysis of public and private-sector data sources (sources include datasets from the U.S. Census Bureau; U.S. Department of Labor; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics; Congressional Research Service; Pew; RAND Corporation; the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University; and Blue Star Families), focused in the in the areas of veteran employment, wellness, family, education, female veterans, and housing.*
- 3) *A review and content analysis of media reporting focused on the social, economic, and wellness life-course of post-9/11 veterans and their families, for the period September 2012 to October 2013. In total, 188 news articles were identified and content analyzed in this review, in the areas of veteran employment, wellness, family, education, female veterans, and housing.*
- 4) *A review and content analysis of philanthropic activity focused on the social, economic, and wellness life-course of post-9/11 veterans and their families. This review considered philanthropic activity over the period 2003 to 2013, aggregating and mapping approximately 14,000 philanthropic gifts and grants made during that period, in the areas of veteran employment, wellness, family, education, female veterans, and housing.*
- 5) *A comprehensive, national survey (primary data collection) entitled, Insights Informing the Concerns of Post-9/11 Veterans & Families: A Survey of Thought Leaders & Influencers, designed to capture the collective perceptions, recommendations, and insights of 130 of the nation's most experienced and influential "Thought Leaders" engaged across the veterans' community. The specific focus of the study considered the perceptions and prescriptions related to why, how, and with what impact those working to advance the concerns of post-9/11 veterans are (or are not) positioned to achieve positive and enduring impact, in the areas of veteran employment, wellness, family, education, female veterans, and housing.*

The purpose of this effort—summarized in the publication *Insights Informing the Concerns of Post-9/11 Veterans and Families: A Converging Analysis*—was to leverage data-driven scholarship, centered on key issue areas of employment, wellness, family, education, female veterans, and housing, to identify themes of focus and action most strongly aligned with broadly advancing the social, economic, and wellness situation of post-9/11 veterans and their families.

In this publication, the strategic and seminal findings stemming from each of the five research efforts outlined above were organized into a conceptual map and framed around common, confounding, and boundary-spanning themes. Nine themes, in total, emerged from the extant research and data as common antecedents of marginalized post-service outcomes across the key issue areas: community connectedness, employment and education, family reintegration focus, independent sector engagement, media engagement, social connectedness, life-course transition, veteran programming differentiation, and women veteran differentiation. In other words, based on the current state of knowledge, these nine themes are suggested to be most strongly associated with producing effective outcomes as related to the post-service experience of veterans and their families.

The findings of the first phase of this research program serve as the bridge to the second phase of the initiative. Specifically, the research team operationalized the nine themes identified in Phase 1 for the second phase of the MSI research initiative: *Informing the Organizational Effectiveness & Impact of Veteran-Serving Non-Profits and Stakeholders*.

Phase 2: Informing the Effectiveness & Impact of Veteran-Serving Non-Profits & Stakeholders

The second phase of the MSI research initiative builds directly from the findings of Phase 1 research described above, for the purpose of understanding how—and with what impact—the nine themes identified to be *common antecedents* to marginalized outcomes (as realized by veterans) are operationalized in the processes and practices of veteran-serving non-profits. This subsequent initiative was guided by the premise that non-profit efficiency and effectiveness are necessary, yet insufficient alone to producing high-performance outcomes in veteran services. Rather, high-impact performance outcomes are also driven by additional processes and methods unique to serving veterans and military families, established in academic literature and conventional wisdom as critical, yet rarely studied in practice.

Given this thematic framework, the goal of the Phase 2 research effort was to identify the extent to which organizational processes and practices aligned with these themes—as enacted by veteran-serving non-profit actors—contribute to effective service delivery. To investigate this question, 25 organizations were selected for robust and comprehensive case analysis. The organizations were selected purposefully (non-random) based on a sample of those self-identifying as expressly serving “veterans” or “military families.” The selection protocol was designed to generate a ‘representative’ sample of the universe of veteran-serving non-profits and to ensure a sufficient degree of organizational variation on factors such as age of the organization, geography of operating scope (local, regional, national), geography of service-delivery region (states served), and programming areas of focus (employment, wellness, family, education, women, and housing).

The research team then developed a comparative case study methodology that was both exploratory and descriptive in nature, designed to identify and aggregate—both within and across the 25 organizations—organizational processes and practices aligned with the themes identified in the first phase of the research program. In a subsequent step, the researchers then considered the relationship between evidence of such

theme-linked processes and practices and effective and impactful service delivery. Data collection involved extensive aggregation of available (public) information on each organization and intensive on-site visits with each organization that included face-to-face interviews with both executive leadership and program staff. An analytical framework grounded in the nine Phase 1 research themes and two additional themes linked to broad-based organizational performance (effectiveness and data measurement) guided each case investigation.

Overall, the purpose of this second phase of research was to understand how the nine themes identified in Phase 1, along with the two additional themes on organizational performance, related to high impact in veteran services. The findings from the in-depth case analysis reveal a great deal of complexity and nuance in the delivery of veteran and military family focused services. The study also confirmed a great deal of conventional wisdom that most organizations viewed the themes studied as important generally. However, some organizations viewed certain themes with greater importance and with greater applicability than others depending on the type of services they provided.

Furthermore, as the title of the second study suggests, this phase of research was designed to broadly inform the community of stakeholders in veteran services—veteran-serving non-profit organizations, donors and grant makers, and veteran and military family consumers, alike. In sum, this study illustrates and provides a firm base of evidence from which to better inform organizational practice, donor strategies, and the veteran and military family consumers on what ‘right’ looks like in this space. Of equal importance as well, it also provides fuel to stimulate further dialogue and action on how the public, private, and independent sectors might better align themselves toward positive, lasting impact on the social, economic, and wellness concerns of our veterans and their families.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Because this study examines veteran-serving non-profit practices and processes as they relate to impact, this section introduces the concept of organizational effectiveness, describes how it relates to veteran-serving organizations, and briefly highlights the veteran non-profit and philanthropic sectors across the U.S.

Organizational Effectiveness

Many experts have advanced definitions for what it means for an organization to be “effective,” though as a concept, organizational effectiveness most generally refers to outcome accountability. Put differently, an organization is effective when it successfully achieves the outcomes it intends to produce.⁵ For non-profit and non-governmental actors, outcome accountability—and thereby effectiveness—has three dimensions:⁶

1. *Defining the goals and objectives as appropriate to the organization and mission;*
2. *Achieving observable progress toward specific outcomes for those objectives; and*
3. *Demonstrating to stakeholders that the promised outcomes are being attained.*

⁵ Scott, W.R. (1992). *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems* (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

⁶ Mitchell, G. & Sevilla, C. (2011). *Defining Organizational Effectiveness*. Transnational NGO Initiative, Practitioner Brief No. 1. Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs, Syracuse University.

Assessing organizational effectiveness, therefore, most generally incorporates a focus on organizational outcomes, processes, and structures.⁷ Specifically,

- **Outcomes:** a focus on materials or objects generated as a result of organizational effort
- **Process:** represents a measure of organizational effort (work quantity)
- **Structures:** a focus on the capacity of the organization to perform, and include human capital, infrastructure, relational capital, resource position, and like measures

Most notably, the relative importance of the processes and structures that support outcome accountability vary as a function of the organization’s stage of development—represented by the organizational lifecycle. Generally, the organizational lifecycle represents three stages of evolution: 1) Inception, 2) Growth, and 3) Maturity.⁸ The figure below details these organizational lifecycle stages further, alongside their associated organizational attributes and processes.

Table 1. Organizational Life Cycle Continuum

With regard to enacting, or externally evaluating, processes and structures that support outcome accountability, research suggests that effective organizations prioritize differently as a function of their own stage of

Lifecycle Stage	Organizational Attributes
Inception/ Early Growth	Informal Structure Subjective Reward Systems Informal Communications Low Adherence to Formal Process Generalist Human Capital Judgement or ‘Gut’ Decision-Making
Growth	Centralized <i>and</i> Formal Structure System-Based Reward Structure Moderately Formal Communications High Adherence to Formal Process Specialist Human Capital Analytical Decision-Making
Maturity	Decentralized <i>but</i> Formal Structure Formal Reward Structure, Data Driven Formal Communications; Rule-Based Process: High Formalization/Low Adherence Strategist Human Capital Decision-Making based on Bargaining

development. Specifically, in the inception, or early stages of the organizational lifecycle, outcome accountability is best supported by **technical efficiency**—a focus on structures and processes that produce quality and consistent outcomes. During the growth stage of the organizational lifecycle, outcome accountability is best supported by a focus on **organizational coordination**—a focus on systemic relationships between units and tasks, and processes that manage organizational complexity. Finally, at the maturity stage of the organizational lifecycle, outcome accountability is best supported by a focus on **relational and political capital**—a focus on structures and processes that advance organizational legitimacy, new market opportunity, and cultivate future resources.

⁷ Scott, W.R. (1992). *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems* (3rd ed.), Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

⁸ Smith, K., Mitchell, T., & Summer, C. (1985). *Top Level Management Priorities in Different Stages of the Organizational Lifecycle*. *Academy of Management Journal*; 28:4, 799-820.

Serving Veterans: Organizational Effectiveness & Social Impact

There are inherent challenges with the widely held assumption that effective organizations—defined by outcome accountability metrics alone—are those that simultaneously create enduring social value and market-based impact.⁹ In the non-profit sector specifically, this assumption is most often undermined based on the misalignment between organizational goals and objectives, the nature of the outcome produced by the organization, and the social, economic, and/or wellness concerns represented by those served by the organization. Put more simply, it's often the case that while an organization can be 'effective' when measured by outcome accountability alone, it's another thing entirely to design and enact processes and structures such that the *outcomes* are most optimally aligned with *both* organizational mission-driven goals and objectives *and* the needs and expectations of the consumer. This is because the social, economic, and wellness needs—and cultural nuances—of the constituency typically served by the non-profit community are often complex, inter-connected, and chronic.

Accordingly, in this research centered on how to seed and cultivate *effective* veteran-serving non-profit organizations, we have rejected the assumption that effective organizations, as defined by outcome accountability metrics alone, are simultaneously those that create enduring social value and market-based impact. Importantly, this is not to say that outcome accountability—and the processes and structures that support outcome accountability—do not play a critical and central role in cultivating high-performing veteran-serving organizations. It is instead to suggest that high-performing veteran-serving non-profit organizations are those that:

1. *Demonstrate organizational effectiveness attributes (embedded within organizational structures and process), appropriate to best support outcome accountability given the organization's stage of development; and,*
2. *Execute on opportunities to adapt and customize organizational processes, practices, culture, and models of service-delivery in ways that reflect and align with the evidence-based themes that correlate with advancing the social, economic, and wellness situation of veterans and their families.*

Setting the Context: The Veteran-serving Non-Profit and Philanthropic Sectors

Since veterans and their families are also members of American society, the true number of non-profit organizations—among the more than 1.8 million recognized by the Internal Revenue Service—that provide services to this community is unknown. However, a January 2014 online search of GuideStar USA generated 45,131 organizations claiming to provide services *explicitly* to either "veterans" (43,451) or "military families" (1,680). Upon closer examination of these organizations, only 7,707 were identified to serve this community along the key issue areas of employment, wellness, family, education, female veterans, and housing (see table below). *Put differently, only 0.4% of registered non-profit organizations across the U.S. have an express mission to serve veterans and their families, in the context of the issue areas and themes identified by academic scholarship as most-impactful relative to advancing post-service social, economic, and wellness concerns.*

9 Cameron, K. & Whetten, D. (1996). *Organizational Effectiveness and Quality: The Second Generation*. Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research, Vol. XI.

Table 2. GuideStar USA Search Results, “Veteran” and “Military Family” VSNPs

Even so, the philanthropic community is well primed to seed and cultivate the efforts of the non-profit sector, focused on advancing the social, economic, and wellness concerns of post-9/11 veterans and their families. Philanthropic support for veterans, families, and communities—like support for other sub-populations of American

society—simultaneously signals and responds to demand for resources and supportive services. Further, philanthropic support can drive public interest and focus attention on certain issues based on giving patterns, solicitation patterns, and advertising related to veteran philanthropy.

A similar 2014 online search of the Foundation Center Online Plus database¹⁰ for “veteran” and “military family” related giving from 2003-2013 returned more than 14,000 grants. Of note, while military veterans’ organizations were the most frequently funded organizations, followed by family services and human services, the fourth most often funded organization type was historical activities and war memorials (see table below). Museums, including specialized museums, received 1,074 grants. Other historical activities and societies received 496 grants. These are most likely not serving veterans directly in the types of activities

GuideStar Non-Profit Search (1/8/14)	Total
Serving "Veterans"	43,451
Serving "Military Families"	1,680
Total	45,131
Serving Reintegration Categories	Total
"Military Families" Total:	1326
Military families, employment:	85
Military families, wellness:	72
Military families, family:	N/A
Military families, education:	628
Military families, women:	396
Military families, housing:	145
"Veterans" Total:	9272
Veteran, employment:	479
Veteran, wellness:	58
Veteran, family:	2939
Veteran, education:	1722
Veteran, women:	3277
Veteran, housing:	797
Total GuideStar Filter (with duplicates)	10598
Total GuideStar Filter (without duplicates)	7707

envisioned for philanthropic support of veteran issues. However, this is important to understand within the context of philanthropic foundation charitable support and missions—not all foundation resources are available to all stakeholders or for all types of support needed by the veteran and families communities.

¹⁰ The Foundation Center Online Plus database represents a historical accounting of “the 10,000 largest private and community foundations in the U.S. based on their annual giving, and [includes] over 2.4 million recently awarded grants.” See <http://foundationcenter.org/>.

Table 3. Foundation Center Search, Top-15 Organization Types and Grants, “Veterans,” 2001 to 2013

Organization Type	Number of Grants
Military-veterans' organizations	5431
Family services	1986
Human services	1641
Historical activities, war memorials	1260
Higher education, college	865
Independent living, disability	798
Museums (history)	755
Higher education	735
Scholarships-financial aid	625
Housing-shelter, temporary shelter	551
International affairs, fund raising-fund distribution	512
Education, single organization support	400
Human services, emergency aid	386
Homeless, human services	380
Housing-shelter, homeless	352

APPROACH

Put simply, the goal of this research is to identify and evaluate those VSNP processes and practices demonstrated to contribute to effective and impactful service delivery. As stated above, however, there is a significant number and variety of organizations comprising the universe of VSNPs across the United States. This research goal therefore requires an approach that is adequately informed by a diverse sampling across the full range of possible VSNPs. To this end, the research team developed a comparative case study design that is both exploratory and descriptive.¹¹ The project is exploratory in that the research team aims to confirm and discover unique, effective practices of veteran and military family serving organizations. Likewise, the project is descriptive in that the analytical approach involves eliciting and highlighting these practices at both individual organization level, and across multiple cases.

The research team ultimately selected 25 organizations (45,131 VSNP’s are identified in GuideStar USA, as of January 2014) to participate in the study. Appendix A provides a listing and brief overview of each of these organizations. Notably, the selection process was purposeful; that is, the team applied (1) a filtering process based on identifying those organizations that met specific performance criteria, and provided a range of different services (diversity of service-types/service-delivery/models) to veteran or military families; and (2) supplementary selection processes based on identifying organizations that would likely provide the researchers the opportunity to consider a variety of different perspectives with regard to setting and context for service-delivery (i.e. vocational/wellness/community; local/regional/national; young organizations/new organizations; longstanding & established organizations). Data collection involved extensive aggregation of available (public) information on each organization, and on intensive on-site visits and interviews with executive leadership and program staff at each organization. This effort was guided by the analytical framework outlined in the next section of the report.

¹¹ Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 3-6.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analytical framework applied to this research follows a “structured, focused case comparison” approach.¹² As such, the study team developed research propositions focused on organizational performance outcomes (efficiency, effectiveness & impact), centered on 11 ‘themes’ linked by research and practice to a) efficient & effective organizations [2 themes], and b) themes demonstrated by extant research to correlate with positively impacting the social, economic, and wellness challenges facing veterans and their families [9 themes].¹³ Based on these themes, the research team then developed a questioning script to guide comparative analysis across the 25 cases; that is, researchers established a common set of analytical questions to apply to each case, as a means of ensuring “the acquisition of comparable data ... [to] contribute to an orderly, cumulative development of knowledge and theory about the phenomenon in question.”¹⁴ Appendix D provides a detailed set of questions and analytical guidance (organized around the eleven themes) applied to data collection and within-case analysis. Following the analysis of each individual case, the research team conducted a cross-case comparison based on the primary themes outlined in the analytical framework. This effort was aimed at identifying key patterns within and across the cases, with specific focus on commonalities and differences correlating to organizational performance outcomes.

The meta-level hypothesis motivating this research is to suggest that the presence of organizational efficiency and effectiveness themes, as embedded within organizational processes and practices, is a necessary condition to support high-impact organizational performance outcomes; however, the presence of organizational effectiveness themes alone – in a veteran-serving context – is insufficient to consistently generate such outcomes high-impact organizational performance outcomes. Instead, the research question motivating this study is based on the proposition that:

Impactful and high-performing VSNP organizations are those that demonstrate organizational effectiveness themes (embedded within organizational processes and structures), and -concurrently execute on opportunities to adapt and customize organizational processes, practices, culture, and models of service-delivery in ways that incorporate process and practice themes demonstrated by extant research to correlate with advancing social, economic, and wellness concerns of veterans and their families.

The cross-case comparison described above was designed to identify key patterns across the cases consistent with informing this meta-level hypothesis, based on thematic commonalities and differences (within and across cases) correlating to organizational performance outcomes.

12 This approach establishes rigor, transparency, and a common standard for comparison that allows for “an orderly, cumulative development of knowledge and theory about the phenomenon in question.” George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

13 Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF). (2014). *Insights Informing the Concerns of Post-9/11 Veterans and Families. Converging Analysis: A Multi-Dimensional Review of the Post-Service Experience*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.

14 Ibid, pp. 69-70.

Strategic Themes Informing Organizational Efficiency & Effectiveness (2):

Organizational Effectiveness Theme

Organizational effectiveness describes outcome accountability – or put differently, the extent to which the organization is successful with regard to achieving the outcomes the organization intends to produce.¹⁵ Dimensions of organizational effectiveness typically incorporate the efficacy of service-delivery and realized performance, as measured against intended outcomes, and also the capacity to allocate and employ organizational resources in their first, best use relative to stated organizational objectives and outcomes. In the context of non-profit/non-governmental actors, it has been suggested that outcome accountability – and therefore effectiveness – has three dimensions:¹⁶

1. *Defining the goals and objectives as appropriate to the organization and mission;*
2. *Achieving observable progress toward specific outcomes for those objectives; and*
3. *Demonstrating to stakeholders that the promised outcomes are being attained*

Assessing organizational effectiveness, therefore, most generally incorporates a focus on organizational outcomes, processes, and structures.¹⁷ Specifically,

- **Outcomes:** *a focus on materials or objects generated as a result of organizational effort*
- **Process:** *represents a measure of organizational effort (work quantity)*
- **Structures:** *a focus on the capacity of the organization to perform, and include human capital, infrastructure, relational capital, resource position, and like measures*

Measurement & Evaluation Theme

This theme focuses on the organization's use of measurement and data collection as a means to analyze, quantitatively or qualitatively, the efficacy and impact of programming and service delivery on those served by the organization. Robust performance measurement and evaluation is central to continuous improvement, and serves to advance opportunity for innovation and learning across the organization. Comprehensive systems of performance-based measurement and evaluation typically incorporate a focus both on internal process efficiencies, and external (or market-based) performance.

15 Scott, W.R. (1992). *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems* (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

16 Mitchell, G. & Sevilla, C. (2011). *Defining Organizational Effectiveness*. Transnational NGO Initiative, Practitioner Brief No. 1. Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs, Syracuse University.

17 Scott, W.R. (1992). *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems* (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Strategic Themes Informing Veteran-Focused Service Delivery (9):

Community Connectedness Theme

Community connectedness represents the degree to, or methods by which, an organization's programs and service delivery model support a broader, comprehensive strategy aligned with the objective of cultivating relationships for the veteran, within a community-connected network of service providers and related support systems. Put differently, community connectedness describes how closely a VSNP collaborates with other veteran-serving organizations, to enhance service-delivery outcomes.

Robust and well-coordinated supportive services are needed most in local communities where veterans ultimately relocate. In these communities, interactions between federal, state, and local government programs and non-profit providers form a complex 'on the ground' web of supportive services with which returning veterans and their families interact. These community-level ecosystems often include a number of actors such as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service (DOL VETS), state workforce development agencies, public and private training and education programs, housing agencies, family support services, counseling centers, and many other public and not-for-profit entities.

Social Connectedness Theme

Social connectedness is the degree to, or methods by, which an organization purposefully advances societal engagement on the concerns of veterans and their families. Specifically, it describes the organization's efforts to bridge the 'civilian-military divide'—to increase a community's understanding of the military and veteran experience and to better connect veterans and their families with members of the broader community.

With the all-volunteer force entering its fifth decade, military culture, training, and traditions are now largely unfamiliar, and inaccessible to most Americans. The social and cultural distance between post-9/11 veterans and the great majority of Americans who did not serve in uniform since 2001, presents a barrier to advancing the post-service lives of our latest generation of veterans and their families. This cultural chasm impacts veterans in a number of ways, for example: (1) in education (veterans not persisting in higher-education out of feeling unwelcome and citing a profound lack of understanding among faculty, administrators, and non-veteran students); (2) in wellness (caregivers, social workers, and clinical care providers not culturally competent related to the service experiences of veterans; veterans, in turn, less willingness to seek and persist with treatment); and (3) in employment (pervasive misconceptions about veterans among employers are persistent barriers to veteran recruitment, hiring, and advancement in the workforce).

A key driver of life satisfaction generally, and a social determinant of health and wellness, is the quality of one's personal relationships (i.e., family, friends, and community). For veterans and service providers alike, increased engagement with civilian society, especially within local communities, is essential to forming these bonds, reduce veterans' social isolation, and increase public understanding of the military experience, and in return, their support of transitioning veterans and their families.

Independent Sector Engagement Theme

The independent sector (private industry, non-profit, philanthropy) plays a critical role in advancing veterans and their families' health and wellness and overall socio-economic standing. Distinct from community connectedness, which focuses on service provider collaboration, independent sector involvement is the degree to, or methods by, which an organization utilizes collaborative strategies across the private, non-profit, and philanthropic sectors in support of their efforts to serve veterans. In other words, it describes a non-profit's interactions and level of engagement with current and future donors and supporters.

Previous research reveals that a lack of coordination, transparency, accountability, and robust performance evaluation and assessment have marginalized and undermined independent sector efforts to advance veterans and military families' standing.¹⁸ Worse, constrained resources have created an increasingly fragmented and competitive community of organizations, making effective collaboration less frequent, despite the fact that 'success' can only be realized based on collaborative strategies that include expanded public-private partnerships, cross-sector industry collaborations, enhanced coordination and knowledge sharing between not-for-profit organizations serving veterans and their families.¹⁹ In the face of waning public attention (and therefore financial) support, it will become increasingly critical for organizations to not only demonstrate transparency, accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness, but also to collaborate well to achieve greater gains on behalf of the nation's post-9/11 veterans and their families.

Programming Differentiation Theme

Programming differentiation represents the degree to, or methods by which, an organization differentiates its programs or service delivery model to purposefully serve sub-cohorts of the veteran population (e.g., women veterans, veterans with disabilities, veterans of different eras, etc.), and their varying needs. There is risk in failing to acknowledge the inherent differences and experiences across veteran sub-cohorts and not understanding how their experiences will influence them after service. Research and expert opinion highlight that the post-service concerns of—for example, women, veterans with disabilities, officers (junior vs. senior), and enlisted (junior vs. senior)—are, in some circumstances, unique to those specific cohorts.²⁰ Consequently, broad generalizations and broadly applied programming may be ineffective, and inappropriate.

In practice, a VSNP that differentiates its programming, acknowledges that certain veterans require specific and unique services. The organization or its staff aptly identify various types of veterans and offer useful, appropriate, and meaningful programming to them. Thus, researchers considered instances of programming and/or service-delivery as differentiated based on specific cohorts – e.g., veterans with physical disabilities, female veterans, veterans with mental trauma, etc. Further, researchers sought to identify whether or not their unique accommodations (cohort specific) advanced organizational performance outcomes.

18 Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF). (2014). *Insights Informing the Concerns of Post-9/11 Veterans and Families. Converging Analysis: A Multi-Dimensional Review of the Post-Service Experience*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.

19 Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF). (2012). *A National Veterans Strategy: The Economic, Social, and Security Imperative*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University. Berglass, Nancy. (2012). *Investing in the Best: How to Support the Nonprofits that Serve Veterans, Servicemembers, and Their Families*. Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security.

20 Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF). (2014). *Insights Informing the Concerns of Post-9/11 Veterans and Families. Converging Analysis: A Multi-Dimensional Review of the Post-Service Experience*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.

Women Veterans Theme

A specific type of veteran programming differentiation, this theme focuses on the degree to, or methods by, which an organization's programs identify and address the distinct set of challenges women veterans face in serving and their post-service consequences.

Beyond the normal risks of military service and combat exposure generally, women veterans face unique, gender-based threats, or even injury, to their overall health and well-being. Notably, military sexual trauma (MST), which is linked to post-traumatic stress, depression, and substance abuse, is a challenge. In addition, women veterans are often more socially isolated than their male counterparts when returning home and this lack of social support is consistently noted as a determining factor in a female veteran's successful transition. Women often bear the burden of being the primary caregiver within their family, sometimes as single mothers, as women veterans face higher rates of divorce. Women veterans are also typically underserved compared to male veterans, less likely to self-identify as veterans, less likely to participate in veteran programs, and less likely to be acknowledged for their military service due to incorrect societal perceptions regarding modern roles in combat.

Women veterans represent a growing percentage of the veteran population, both as a result of increasing numbers of women serving, and due to the gradual passing of older, predominantly male veterans. Further definition of the issues facing this demographic of veterans is critical, as are efforts to mitigate sub-optimal, post-service outcomes.

Family Reintegration Theme

Family reintegration is a key theme involving the degree to, or methods by, which an organization identifies veterans' family-related reintegration challenges and tailors its programming and service delivery model to meet these needs.

Reintegrating veterans with their families is among the most pressing of concerns for the veteran community. Post-9/11 veterans, in particular, experience significant family-related readjustment and reintegration challenges to include redefining of family roles; unwelcoming feelings in their household; and lost connections with spouse, partners, and children. Additional stressors placed on the family due to frequent moves during service—e.g., the constant need to rebuild social networks, change schools, and establish new friendships—can be exacerbated *after* transition from the military, disrupting the familiar pattern of PCS moves and the familiar social support network of the military community. A commonly overlooked challenge for military families is not only the redefinition of the veteran's identity in civilian society, but also that of the military family. Invariably, family members also experience changes to their environment, norms, culture, and behaviors when integrating into a new community outside of the military. Holistic health and wellness begins with stability at home; for those seeking to ensure that post-9/11 veterans survive and flourish in society, the need to address their family-related challenges is imperative.

Employment & Education Theme

Employment and education represent primary concerns of veterans today, particularly post-9/11 era veterans. This theme centers on the degree to, or methods by which, an organization embeds a focus on stable employment and education as essential to veterans' long-term health and wellness and whether its programs, services, and/or integrated support network advance or emphasize their importance to the veterans or families they serve. Enduring employment and advanced education are critical social determinants of long-term health and wellness. For veterans, securing employment and advancing their education—most importantly immediately after separation—is vital to ensuring positive social, economic, and wellness outcomes over the course of their lives. Indeed, a veteran's failure to educate herself and, ultimately, find gainful and sustained employment upon transitioning from the military can lead to a detrimental sequence of events that may produce lasting impacts on long-term financial health, housing, family stability, feelings of isolation, mental health, and more.

Media Engagement Theme

This theme is defined by the degree to, or methods by, which an organization leverages media to tell the stories of its mission and its veterans and to bridge the civilian-military divide by raising awareness of veterans' issues.

Given its reach, popular media is a powerful and enduring tool that will continue to shape the cultural narrative that defines our veterans. Media, however, has not always served the veteran population well. Often, veteran and military family-related news reports center on sensational content (e.g. the 2014 VA scandal, veteran suicide, domestic violence) than presenting balanced perspectives on issues and potential solutions. Stories often focus on the extremes—for example, reporting the 'danger' of post-traumatic stress on one end and feeding the 'hero' narrative on the other—at the expense of the majority represented in the middle.

Regular engagement and dialogue with popular media, focused on leveraging it as a tool to shape a balanced portrait of our veterans and their social, economic, and wellness concerns, is essential to countering the extreme narratives, informing our society, and bridging the civilian-military divide.

Life-Course Transition Theme

Transition represents the degree to, or methods by, which an organization's programs and services ensure that veterans and their families are adequately prepared for post-service life, particularly in making informed decisions related to employment, education, family concerns, and community reintegration. Many post-9/11 veterans—particularly the youngest veterans—are unprepared for the transition from military to civilian life. Results from a survey of national thought leaders indicate the need for further improvement of DoD's Transition Assistance Program (TAP), suggesting that post-9/11 veterans have not been adequately prepared to make informed decisions related to employment, education, family concerns, and community reintegration.²¹ Though many veterans eventually make successful transitions, the consequences for those who do not are too severe (e.g., unemployment, homelessness, significant financial hardship, poor health outcomes, and even suicide) to allow transition to proceed without significant changes and immediate, effective community-level interventions intended to best prepare servicemembers for post-service life. Community-based non-profit organizations serving veterans and their families, thereby, serve a critical role in complementing government efforts in preparing veterans for transition.

21 Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF). (2014). *Insights Informing the Concerns of Post-9/11 Veterans and Families. Converging Analysis: A Multi-Dimensional Review of the Post-Service Experience*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.

III. THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This section presents the detailed findings from a comparative case analysis of leading and differentiating practices across the 25 participating organizations. Two subsections follow in accordance with our analytical framework.

First, we provide key findings related to two key themes related to organizational impact: Themes of Organizational Effectiveness, and Performance Measurement and Evaluation. Second, we highlight trends and leading practices across the nine strategic themes related to providing impactful veteran focused services (listed alphabetically): community connectedness, employment and education, family reintegration, independent sector involvement, media, social connectedness, transition, veteran programming differentiation, and women veteran efforts.

STRATEGIC THEMES ON ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

Organizational Effectiveness Themes

A foundational element of a strong system of veteran focused services is the effectiveness and maturity of the organizations themselves. Without strong leadership, strategy, systems, and processes, the best-intentioned individuals with the most enlightened theories of change may fall short of their potential to serve America’s veterans and their families. Toward that end, organizations serving this population are beholden to many complex factors that can affect their performance—regulations, economic conditions, leadership style, and the availability of talent and other resources. Organizational effectiveness focuses on a given non-profit’s methods of transforming inputs (human capital, financial resources, infrastructure) into outputs (programs delivered, housing units provided, emergency assistance distributed) and outcomes (reduction in unemployment, financial independence, healthy family relationships). How well an organization meets its objectives is not to be confused with organizational efficiency; efficiency measures simply tell how much output an organization gets for its inputs and are not sufficient alone as an indicator of success (though the two go hand-in-hand). For example, an organization can rank high in various efficiency measures, but the quality of their service can actually decline as efficiency increases.

In the non-profit world, competition for funding can be just as fierce as competition for customers between for-profit enterprises, and this competition can drive a need for non-profits to evolve and improve their operations, using organizational effectiveness theories as a starting point. It can be difficult or even problematic to describe an organization as “effective”; indeed at any given time an organization may be stronger in some areas and weaker in others, while still producing what it deems an adequate output—whether a physical product, customer experience, or impact on a community or constituency. It is up to the organization to define their desired outcomes, how those outcomes should be measured, and to evaluate performance against the desired outcomes in order identify their strengths and areas for improvement.

In addition, the organization’s various stakeholders (funders, partners, and customers or clients) may have different desired outcomes. An “effective” non-profit organization must build and navigate relationships with these various stakeholders in order to communicate the priorities of the organization and to understand and balance the priorities of funders and other partners. At times, these varying objectives can come into conflict with one another, creating management challenges for the organization. An example of such competing or conflicting priorities might be a donor’s desire to see a high financial efficiency rating—a low ratio of administrative costs

to program expenditures—versus the organization’s desire to attract and retain talent with comparable salaries and benefits to what might be received in the private sector, which may damage said rating. Likewise, a donor may wish to see high throughput, while the organization views its high-touch model which requires hours of work with each client to be a critical driver of its success; thus changing the model to accept additional funding may degrade the quality of service such that the funding opportunity may not have been worth the cost.

Noting that there is a significant and enduring need for this generation of veterans, and that the funding environment for organizations serving post-9/11 veterans is likely to become significantly more restricted as public attention wanes post-Afghanistan drawdown, now is the time to focus on organizational effectiveness to ensure that each dollar is used most efficiently and effectively to create the greatest impact. In support of this need, the research explored the concept of organizational effectiveness within the non-profits included in this study, to determine organizations’ focus on this concept relative to their day-to-day programming execution.

Trends and Observations in the Field

Throughout this effort, the research team’s primary focus was to identify elements unique to serving veterans and their families—what have been referred to as the nine strategic themes, explored in depth later in this section. In this process of data collection, the research team also explored the underlying structures and processes that were common to successful non-profits to understand the status of “organizational effectiveness” among the landscape of organizations serving veterans, as well as to understand how these elements relate to veteran-specific themes in driving high-quality service delivery.

It should be noted that while the universe of organizations serving the broader veteran population is not new, the sub-sector of organizations serving post-9/11 veterans has only existed for roughly 13 years and many of these organizations are relatively immature along the organizational development spectrum. One particular insight of this research was that of the scores of organizations founded in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks and the initiation of the ensuing conflicts, few – if any – estimated that they would still be “in business” over a decade later. Thus, they paid little attention to the development of organizational infrastructure and maturity rather than simply attempting to accomplish the mission with whatever resources were at hand. Growth, for example, was reactive rather than proactive or strategic, in many cases. That said, the following common elements of organizational effectiveness emerged which demonstrated the maturity of organizations along the developmental spectrum:

Clearly Defined Mission Statement. Serving as a summary of what the organization is, what its values are, and its underlying purpose, leaders in the field differentiated themselves from others by clearly articulating their organization’s reason for existence rather than authoring a nebulous statement of desired impact. A clear mission statement was demonstrated to unify staff around a common set of goals and activities toward a shared ideal outcome, and such a statement can serve as the foundation upon which culture, structures, systems, and processes can be built. Staff members in each organization were asked what they viewed as the organization’s mission and its intended impact. Staff at the leading organizations either recited the official mission statement verbatim or similar language, which indicates that the leadership team has crafted a mission that serves as a constant aim and rallying point for staff members to focus their efforts. A good mission statement, in essence, defines the reason why an organization’s staff should be motivated to come to work in the morning.

Organizational Values and Culture. An organization's values tie to its mission and ground its core purpose and focus. They are best described as an organization's pillars of conduct that every individual ascribes to and strives to follow, and serve as the foundation of a culture that has direct impact on the recruiting, hiring and professional development processes of an organization. Ideals that permeate the organization—those that are shared by all about what it means to be a part of the organization and how the organization interacts with its clients—serve as broad guidelines that ensure a consistent focus on mission accomplishment. The values themselves, however, are less likely to be formally codified. While it was rare for organizations in the field to express a codified list of values, through interviews with leaders and staff members at numerous organizations, it became clear that certain values were thoroughly integrated into the fabric and culture of the organization and the vision of how each staff member conducts his or her duties. As with the mission statement above, leading organizations often unintentionally demonstrated their values to the research team as, through conversations, the same language was repeatedly echoed by staff members about how they treat their clients and what is important to them as members of the team. This is evidence that, while perhaps not codified, these values have been consistently communicated to the staff and emphasized for their importance.

Metrics. Further discussed in the following measurement and evaluation section, a clear sign of organizational maturity and effectiveness was the desire and ability to track performance, both internal and external. Mature organizations had developed staff assessment procedures and incentive systems based on systems of measurement that tied to either internal process metrics or an assessment of mission performance and impact, as defined by the organizations themselves. These organizations also established formal externally-based metrics that tracked their desired impact and supported regular strategic planning sessions to evaluate progress toward defined goals, as well as assess the necessity of changing the strategic direction of the organization. Data gathering can include benchmarking, for example, where an organization will compare its processes and performance metrics against the best practices of other similar organizations. In this evaluation, an organization may measure dimensions such as quality, progress, time, cost effectiveness, and overall efficiency. Subsequent to data collection, and only demonstrated by the most mature organizations, is data analysis, in which an organization systematically applies statistical or logical techniques to describe and illustrate, condense, and examine each component of the data provided. External metrics were those required by a funder (either individual or corporate—i.e., what do they want to see?) or those required by the federal government and similarly utilize both data collection and data analysis. Of note, organizations' use of data primarily appear to be tied to funding requirements or requests, as numerous organizations articulated that they simply did not have the organizational capacity to conduct further analyses above what was minimally required of them, though they wished to have the capability to do so.

Strategic Planning. Leading non-profits were found to tie their mission statements to outputs and outcomes, and leverage a strategic planning process to chart the methods by which these outputs and outcomes would be achieved. Leading organization's planning processes included short- and long-term objectives to promote sustainability of operations into the future and incorporated the results of measurement and feedback to adjust organizational structure, systems/processes, and human capital, as necessary to drive toward the organizations' objectives.

A sampling of strategic planning processes found in the field included:

- *Assessments of what population the organization should serve as the funding landscape changes (active duty versus veterans);*
- *What partnerships to join or to divest themselves from;*
- *How to allocate paid staff versus volunteers across the organization;*
- *Whether to generally raise the salary level across the organization to attract and retain higher talent;*
- *Whether to centralize programmatic control in one main office or to decentralize it in field offices around the country; and*
- *Whether to open a new facility and how that might change the organization's business model.*

The most mature organizations included in this study regularly reviewed their mission statements and assessed their progress based on established metrics and against goals and desired impact. These reviews resulted in shifts and alterations to the business model to react to changes in the veterans' services landscape as necessary. As a broad theme, it appeared that an organization's likelihood of conducting strategic planning processes generally correlated with its level of funding, which may or may not also correlate with organizational maturity.

Diverse Funding Sources. As a for-profit business would place itself at considerable risk by relying heavily on a sole product line for its survival, a non-profit must ensure that it diversifies its funding sources to protect against the consequences of discontinuation of any individual source. Social services providers in the veterans' services field tend to be heavily funded by the federal government (HVRP, SSVF, HUD VASH, etc.), which is potentially more stable than corporate funding but must be renewed every few years. Organizations relying upon corporate funding expressed concern over the "shiny object" effect, in which while veterans are currently the popular cause for corporations to support, as public attention wanes, corporate support is likely to shift correspondingly. Consequently, organizations funded with a majority of corporate funding feel under significant threat over the next ten years and must identify new sources of funding. Those organizations primarily funded by small, individual donors, are at even greater threat of this phenomenon. Organizations with diversified funding sources also demonstrated to the research team greater flexibility to fund non-programmatic expenditures that enhanced organizational effectiveness and outreach, such as measurement and evaluation staff, development staff, or a communications team.

Organizational Effectiveness in Action

In accordance with the baseline measures, elements, and frameworks delineated above, the following organizations are examples of what is necessary to optimize organizational effectiveness.

Hire Heroes USA (HHUSA). HHUSA, headquartered in Alpharetta, Georgia, is a national organization that provides specifically tailored employment readiness training and limited job placement services to veterans and their spouses. HHUSA's mission is clear: the organization is "dedicated to creating job opportunities for US military veterans and their spouses through personalized training and corporate engagement." This mission informs the staff's dual efforts to shape veteran labor supply through extensive career coaching, resume writing, and interview preparation assistance, as well as their efforts to

educate corporate partners on the value of hiring veterans and to enroll these partners in a database of veteran-specific hiring opportunities. Likewise, the leadership team maintains the organization's focus on this mission to ensure that by not branching out into other areas – housing, wellness, etc. – HHUSA does not degrade the quality of its employment services. To date, HHUSA has assisted over 7,000 veterans and remains dedicated to grow this number through continuous improvements in its delivery model.

A clear set of values and culture are evident across the staff. The team values the notion of providing “tough love” to their veterans – that is, treating them as the warriors they are and not as victims when presenting them with the reality of the challenges they will face. The notion of empowering assets to society to achieve their full potential appears to influence and motivate every member of the staff. The team is also very clearly committed to the value of individualized attention to its veterans, as nearly every member of the staff mentioned the hours HHUSA spends with each veteran as the unique differentiator between it and other providers.

HHUSA has a robust internal system of data collection that tracks each veteran's progress throughout their programs, as well as their post-program outcomes, to include hiring status and salary information when available. HHUSA maintains an outreach staff for whom a major responsibility is gathering client feedback months after service delivery is complete, in order to inform future programming and to assess quality of staff performance. Data gathering regarding throughput is also benchmarked against averages determined over time (calculated based on an appropriate level of time per client to ensure quality), which is then used to provide performance bonus for highly-performing staff.

In regards to funding, HHUSA has a partnership with the USO and a grant from the Call of Duty Endowment (CODE), which are the organization's two main sources of funding. Funding from these two entities is a mix of restricted and unrestricted funds and both funding streams have reporting requirements attached. In addition, Hire Heroes USA leverages its partnership with MedAssets for in-kind contributions like IT equipment and support, and office space.

Goodwill Houston. The Goodwill Veterans Workforce Development Center in Houston, Texas serves as an example of several strong organizational practices. Staff members are deeply committed to the mission of providing employment services to disadvantaged veterans in the community, answering calls and serving veterans at all hours of the day and night. The CEO's articulated value that “Our mission is people” is visible through the efforts of every member of his staff.

Goodwill Houston employs one staff member specifically dedicated to aggregating data through the use of the Empowered Case management system, which informs funders, the Board of Directors, organizational leadership, and case managers as to the status and performance of each program. This system also works in tandem with the federally-mandated HMIS (Housing Management Information System) to meet all grant reporting requirements. Data include, assessments, enrollments, and placements in the programs, hires, and targets for wage per population served.

Using this data along with leadership and staff expertise, Goodwill Houston participates in an extensive strategic planning effort every year, which reaches all the way down to programmatic staff and is used to hold these staff accountable for their annual performance. This planning process begins with the Goodwill Houston advisory board which articulates a five-year strategic plan, which is then

combined with an internal SWOT analysis conducted through consultation with program managers and including requirements from grants, such as benchmarks and goals which must be achieved each year. This internal planning is then considered in the context of United Way of Greater Houston's five-year Community Needs Assessment, which is published every three years. The sum of these inputs are converted into the veteran workforce programs team's strategic plan, and converted into each program manager's services deliverable sheet, which includes program outcomes, target numbers of community partnership meetings, employer symposiums, and MOUs. Each program manager signs this document and is held accountable for achieving these benchmarks.

Finally, Goodwill Houston also benefits from a broad array of funding sources, backed by a steady revenue stream internal to the organization. The majority of veterans served by Goodwill Houston's veterans' programs are funded through competitive grants from the US Departments of Labor and Veterans affairs, with some post-9/11 veterans served through the Walmart-funded Operation Good Jobs. Smaller grants, such as those from the Wounded Warrior Project and regional organizations such as Work in Texas and Lone Star Veterans Association supplement programming as well. However, one of Goodwill Houston's major strengths is revenue from Goodwill stores, which serves as a backup to maintain services, should one of these grants go away.

Further Insights

A unique challenge facing some relatively newer veteran-serving non-profits involves the retention of high-quality human capital. While countless high quality organizations have existed for decades, most new organizations emerging after September 11, 2001—many of which are generally dedicated to serving post-9/11 veterans—have successfully attracted top talent to their ranks. While this phenomenon is present in many post-9/11 veteran-serving non-profits, it appears particularly heightened among organizations with highly compelling missions, public images, and charismatic leaders. Team Rubicon and Hire Heroes USA serve as two examples. However, some high-quality recruits fill junior-level roles and, despite their initial selflessness and willingness to do so simply to be a part of the organization, can grow professionally dissatisfied and eventually move on.

Team Rubicon, for example, was borne out of the desires of the founders to rededicate one's self to a noble purpose and assist those affected by the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Today, the organization mobilizes 16,000 veteran volunteers in teams across the country and the world to respond to small- and large-scale disasters, serving in communities and helping restore veterans' sense of purpose. Some are relegated to junior-level work, however, as there are currently limited opportunities for paid leadership positions in the organization. Over time, therefore, those joining the organization out of pure idealism can grow weary and leave the organization.

Hire Heroes USA has the same challenge of talent retention. The organization often hires former junior and mid-grade officers to serve as Veteran Transition Specialists eager to make an impact on the lives of those with whom they served. COO Nate Smith explains that while he would love to offer these highly qualified individuals leadership opportunities, the structure of the mission simply does not require it—Hire Heroes USA runs on a broad supply of Veteran Transition Specialists and so turnover is sometimes inevitable.

Performance Measurement and Evaluation Themes

Data collection, measurement, and analysis are critical components of an organization's ability to track the efficiency of its internal processes, the performance of its staff, the quantity, and quality of its outputs, and the effectiveness of its programs through the outcomes it has on the population it serves. Organizations seek to improve performance, fulfill reporting requirements, and articulate impact to stakeholders and funders through multiple quantitative and qualitative data collection methods including database management, reports and summaries, and impact surveys and questionnaires, among others.

To assess this theme across the 25 organizations, the research team explored organizations' use of data both to satisfy funder requirements and to improve organizational performance. The latter includes proactive efforts to integrate performance information into a regular planning and assessment process. In addition, researchers explored how organizations leverage data over both the short and long-term to track veterans' progress during and after service delivery and assess their lasting impact. Finally, researchers sought to understand how organizations communicate impact to boards, stakeholders, and funders and how they navigate the tension between a funding environment that increasingly demands quantitative metrics and a human services industry whose impact is often subjective and best captured qualitatively.

Trends and Observations in the Field

With respect to the use of data and measurement to support impact, the 25 participating organizations fell into three general groups, described below.

Proactive, Robust, and Self-sustained. These organizations collect broad swathes of data about the population they serve, to include demographic information (e.g., age, gender, address, service branch, dates of entry and separation, rank or pay grade, deployments, primary military occupational specialty, active security clearances, education level, additional languages spoken and awards), type of military service, requirements for treatment and programming, among others. Demographic information can be a laundry list and often appropriately tailored to the unique programming and services an organization provides. These organizations have substantial and high-functioning systems for internal and external metrics that can cumulatively measure impact. Further, these organizations are not reactive in nature. That is, their use of data collection, internally and externally, is not driven by funder requirements or federal grant compliance. Rather, these organizations collect and record extensive data on the number of people served, nature of services, and outcomes for their own organizational benefit as well—not simply those that are externally mandated. These organizations typically analyze internal processes alongside outputs and outcomes, in the effort to match internal systems with external success. For example, at organizations such as the Cohen Clinic or Hire Heroes USA, caseworkers record the interventions, placements provided, and duration of treatments, all of intrinsic origin and value, and all of which drive organizational self-reflection and planning of future programming. Organizations in this category may participate in the SSVF or HVRP programs mentioned below, but are not satisfied by complying with the data requirements of these programs in informing their approaches.

Directed by Compliance (federal funding or individual/corporate funders). Organizations such as this gather and report data that is primarily, if not solely, driven by the requirements of funders. While not limited to government funding specifically, organizations in this category often are funded through

the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program that uses the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to input data entry for clients served. Because the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) use this information as a monitoring tool for performance and auditing, details about the programs and accomplishments are necessary. Such details include numbers of families re-housed, number of enrollments, number of job placements, and target number of hires (included in the Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program). State-level funding often comes with additional data entry systems, placing a further burden on these organizations. Organizations in this category often attribute their lack of additional data gathering and analysis to a lack of capacity to go over-and-above the specific requirements of funders, partly driven by the high program-to-administrative cost ratios required by the government funding which sustains them. It should be noted, however, that government funding requirements do not restrict all organizations. Some organizations satisfy the needs of private funders and do not conduct additional analysis.

Minimal Focus. These organizations are best characterized and described as in the nascent stages of data collection and analysis. This data collection is often rote and mechanical, including case notes and spreadsheets, and is generally not shared among caseworkers or processed across the organization. Further, these organizations recognize their weaknesses and what they must do to measure program delivery, quality, and impact. Some have no processes or methods of data collection at all.

Within organizations demonstrating a focus on data collection and measurement supporting effectiveness and impact, a range of common practices emerged. The following serves as a non-exhaustive sampling of practices observed in the field:

Anecdotal Evidence. Anecdotal evidence is information gathered from outgoing surveys and questionnaires, for example, and usually a sampling of how a veteran believes that the organization is performing. This evidence constitutes subjective value judgments from veteran clients on the quality of treatment received, how the programming assisted them or their families, and how to improve program delivery in the future. These vignettes and snapshots (whether at the point of crisis, post-programming, or a continual spectrum of treatment) provide a clearer picture for the organization, other veterans, and even possible funders who want to ensure that a particular service has positive impact. Thus, firsthand accounts of experiences can go far in determining efficiency and efficacy.

Medical and Clinical Research Studies. These medical studies are unique and specific to one cohort, those who suffered physical or mental trauma in combat. Those VSNPs that are actively conducting medical research and delivering findings from ongoing studies are not only building a database but also providing measured data points from which to check their research and improve in the future. Consequently, these clinics possess a sophisticated apparatus to collect, assess, and use data to measure effectiveness.

Federal Compliance Information Systems. Described above, this is an extrinsic measurement based on compulsory requirements from the federal government. The most common is the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which allows the Housing of Urban Development (HUD) and/or the Veterans Department (VA) to monitor and audit the particular veteran service organization.

Internal Metric Collection. More than mere ‘plugging and chugging’ of data, this necessary and required intake information is a way to gauge the effectiveness of the organization and understand the population served. Internal metric collection can involve an array of methods and practices, including raw data collection, spreadsheet development and management, gathering of demographic information, creation and publication of formalized reviews, and statistical reporting. This common practice is derived from neither funder demands (individual or corporate) nor federal compliance requirements.

Future Collaborations. Certain VSNPs recognize the limits of their own internal capacity to collect, manage, and utilize data in order to improve their own effectiveness. Thus, the existence of an explicit and strategic plan to expand this capability by collaborating with other entities operating within the veteran landscape already engaged in effective data collection and management is a noteworthy commonality recognized by VSNPs that wish to bridge this divide of understanding their impact on the veteran and his family. Additionally, certain VSNPs have partnered with private sector organizations specializing in measurement and analysis of performance through pro bono arrangements.

Measurement in Focus

As noted above, a proactive and self-sustaining veteran-serving organization will have a robust data collection program. The most successful organizations in this landscape have significant internal metrics that assist in ensuring high-quality service and programming.

American Corporate Partners. American Corporate Partners (ACP) is an organization that utilizes internal data collection methods to ensure that it provides high quality and efficient programming for veterans. ACP’s unique programming is a well-regarded mentorship model that relies heavily upon internally designed metrics. After each mentor and mentee completes a thorough and meticulous questionnaire, ACP measures each individual’s suitability for the program, and generates a match based on data gathered. Data collected throughout the relationship include frequency, type, and quality of contact and feed a subjective “grading” system that allows ACP staff to evaluate the status of each mentor-mentee relationship (assigning a grade of A through D). ACP staff leave relationships with high grades alone and more closely monitor relationships receiving low grades to encourage greater and higher-quality contact between the two participants. Upon conclusion of a relationship, each individual completes a closeout survey. The exit survey collects substantial data and is designed to gauge participant satisfaction and inform future programming. ACP’s entire data and measurement process is comprehensive with the intent of making the most appropriate pairing between veterans and corporate mentors.

Team Red, White, and Blue. Team Red, White, and Blue (Team RWB) also serves as an example organization that has designed its own internal methods for tracking its impact. Naturally, most funders prefer to support projects and programming that demonstrate immediate, tangible impact such as transitional housing or emergency financial assistance. Because Team RWB views transition and reintegration as a lifelong process (and its supporting role), it must be able to connect the dots and depict to its funders how its delivery model and programs contribute to veterans’ long-term health and wellness and that they are more than a running and physical fitness club.

Leveraging the assistance of several volunteers with doctoral-level social science and program evaluation training, Team RWB has launched two separate organizational impact surveys: one focused on collecting feedback and its impact on its veteran, military and civilian members broadly and another focused on leader development across its chapters, regions, and executive staff. The membership-focused survey utilizes established (social psychology) measures on perceptions of social connectivity, shared purpose, and life satisfaction as well as views on the civilian-military divide and general health and activity levels—all factors that drive toward Team RWB’s stated mission of enriching veterans’ lives through increased social and physical activity. Their initial launch of this survey in early 2014 resulted in more than 4,000 member responses. This assessment now has multiple components. New veteran members register and complete an initial survey to establish a baseline (in return for the organization’s iconic athletic shirt), which now feeds into the primary membership survey conducted periodically to assess impact over time. In addition, the second leadership focused survey was under design at the time of this study but is aimed at collecting information from volunteer leaders on how serving in those roles have influenced them within Team RWB and in their personal and professional lives. This is a noteworthy and proactive approach to assess and continuously improve program delivery and design.

American GI Forum/National Veterans Outreach Program, Inc. As mentioned above, external metrics continuously drive data collection to measure impact, both because of federal compliance requirements and, often, because the veteran service organization is mandated to do so at the direction of funders and donors. The San Antonio-based American GI Forum/National Veterans Outreach Program, Inc. (AGIF/NVOP) is recognized nationally as a leader in providing community-based services to veterans with special needs. A respected homeless veteran service provider, AGIF/NVOP is a HUD-funded grantee as well as an SSVF program participant that utilizes the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to input data entry for clients served. Information collected provides a record of the client base and the numbers of veterans who have been placed in housing. Thinking progressively, AGIF/NVOP’s data collection requirements inspired the hiring of additional staff to monitor, evaluate, and conduct deeper analysis on its services to remain relevant and impactful to an ever-changing population of veterans. AGIF/NVOP recognizes that federal reporting requirements serve as a baseline, minimum standard. As philanthropic resources grow more constrained and competition for funding increases, having observable evidence on program outcomes and effectiveness will become even more important. All major non-profits in this landscape are increasingly under pressure to conduct greater data collection and analysis to articulate impact and acquire funding. To this end, AGIF/NVOP is preparing a white paper for Walmart focusing on their outcomes, specifically for the cohort of female veterans they serve.

Further Insights

In addition to non-profits’ general lack of capacity to conduct data gathering and analysis, in addition to baseline grant requirements, organizations consistently noted the difficulty in capturing longitudinal data reflective of the long-term impact of their programming. Multiple staff members and leaders articulated the notion that once veterans exit programming, they rarely keep in touch with staff members unless they return to the organization for further services, so organizations typically can only attribute a veteran or family member as having completed a course of programming as a success. Few organizations have established outreach positions that attempt to reach “graduate” veterans 6, 12, or even 18 months post-service delivery. As mentioned throughout, this capability is intended to both inform practice and facilitate the articulation of impact to current and potential funders.

Also of note, a few non-profits included in this study indicated that they have a difficult time articulating impact for the services they provide to veterans, though they feel innately that the services they provide are impactful. President and CEO of Soldier's Angels (SA) Amy Palmer noted that identifying a qualitative indicator—i.e., the perceived value of care packages by the recipient—would be an important tool to effectively measure the organization's impact. Jennifer Cernoch, VP of Operations, agreed but noted the difficulty in measuring something as subjective as the impact of a care package, stating that "Foundation dollar donations want quantified proof that quality of life is improved. How do you measure that?" Further, USO of Illinois tries to measure the emotional impact on a veteran they have served by using the term "resiliency," whereas USO International uses the term of "goodness" delivered. These terms not only are ambiguous but also, in terms of success or impact, highly subjective to the veteran recipient. Concretely measuring the impact of free "No Dough Dinners" (free dinners provided by the USO) is nearly impossible. Therefore, the staff members at USO of Illinois are focused more on practical application of their data collection efforts.

STRATEGIC THEMES ON VETERAN FOCUSED SERVICE DELIVERY

Community Connectedness Themes

Within this strategic theme, the research team explored the extent to which the 25 participating organizations integrated themselves within broader networks of providers in their communities and, of those that did, identify their methods and strategies for doing so. The team identified formal and informal relationships with other VSNPs, community health providers, government services, and private sector entities aimed at directly supporting the organization's service delivery models (i.e., *not* strategic funding partnerships). In addition, the research team explored the nature of VSNP strategies (or lack thereof) for developing their partnerships and goals for maintaining and developing future partnerships were also explored. A few patterns emerged across the 25 organizations; however, it is no surprise that the findings on this theme varied widely given fundamental differences across cases.

Trends and Observations in the Field

The research team's site visits yielded several key findings related to community connectedness and integrated service delivery across the veterans' services landscape. First, among those serving veterans and their families, both at the leadership and programmatic staff levels, there is a general consensus to the research-based assertion that while government resources are critical, community-based resources 'make or break' a veteran's transition since, transition inevitably occurs at the community level. In addition, the field research confirms an ostensibly universal agreement that veterans experience multiple, interrelated challenges and that VSNPs bear some level of responsibility to refer veterans to other resources as necessary. It is less clear, however, whether they feel this is a moral responsibility, have learned it out of practical necessity from client requests, or both.

Although the 25 participating organizations represent a broad cross-section of service-types and geographic areas of focus, they tended to fall into one of three general groupings with regard to community connectedness.

Community Leaders. The first group of organizations had the strongest focus on this theme, serving as leaders within their communities and hubs of their local networks of veterans' services. These organizations tended to be older, more established within their communities, or associated with a national brand-name organization with enough resources to support a broad-based networking

and collaboration strategy. These organizations' leaders were sometimes seen as bedrocks of the local veterans' services community, and these individuals tended to have a vision not only for their organization but for the community in which they operated and how that community related to its veterans, as well as some ability (whether financial resources, convening ability, or political capital) to implement that vision.

Active Participants. The second group of organizations were active participants in networks and sought to partner with others to complement the services they provided to their clients. While they may or may not have outreach staff specifically dedicated to collaboration, they understood and valued the networks and communities they operated in and worked within the resource constraints of their organizations to maximize their ability to collaborate. These organizations may attend consortia meetings, participate in communities of practice or collective impact networks, and may or may not establish Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with their partners. For those organizations in this category that were operating in communities without established networks of veteran-service providers, leaders actively sought to develop their own formal or informal networks. Referrals between these organizations may be formal or informal (involving structured or non-structured processes).

Minimal Focus. The third group of organizations, for multiple reasons, had less of a focus on community connectedness, and some even possessed no intention of fitting within a community-based framework. Some organizations determined that they have (and desire) a narrow expertise and that given either resource constraints or organizational strategy, it is best for their staff to remain focused on excellence within their mission area rather than to focus on multiple categories of need for the veterans they serve. Other organizations rely heavily on volunteers who are unqualified to assess veteran need and thus it would be irresponsible to trust them with helping a veteran navigate to other veterans' services. Whatever the reason, despite these organizations' lack of strong focus on connectedness to other organizations, they often have at least minimal resource guides for their staff to inform them as to available resources for critical needs that their veterans may have.

Common Practices – Community Connectedness

Among organizations that demonstrate a focus on community connectedness, a range of common practices emerged as methods of operationalizing the desire to collaborate and integrate into an organization's community. The following serves as a non-exhaustive sampling of practices observed in the field.

Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). Development of formalized memoranda of understanding between organizations to establish expectations for the relationships as well as processes for referrals, communication systems, periodic meeting schedules, and periodic review and/or assessment of the status and value of the relationship. Some organizations in this study viewed a responsibility to their formal partners to ensure that their partnerships provided a 'return on investment'—if each partner is willing to invest time and resources to meaningfully work together, the relationship must be fruitful and valuable. If not, upon periodic review, the relationship would be terminated.

Community Coalitions. Participation in or facilitation of community partner meetings or coalitions, whether veteran-focused or not. Examples of this include HUD-organized Continuums of Care, consortia sponsored by the United Way, coalitions of employers seeking to hire veterans, and coalitions of educators seeking to advance leading practices within their institutions.

Complementary Partnerships. Formal (small) coalitions of organizations, each with complementary services—homelessness and workforce development providers partnering together, for example, sometimes jointly filing for grants, such that these organizations with complementary services almost operate as one. In at least one case, the collective group of complementary organizations appeared to be so important that the focus seemed more on the collective than the individual organization. Conversations with organizational leadership about activities, budgets, and staff structures primarily included references to the group of organizations rather than simply focusing on the individual.

Formalized Referral Networks. Participation in community-wide formalized referral networks or collective impact strategies (such as those supported by referral-management technology), a relatively new and emergent leading practice in the field of veterans' services. Multiple organizations visited have joined such externally managed referral networks designed to optimize collaboration and formalize referrals.

Communities of Practice. Participation in or leadership of communities of practice (such as those surrounding the VA's SSVF program, observed by the GWBI team in Houston, New York State, and New England) which facilitate collective knowledge sharing and development among organizations. Organizations participating in communities of practice train each other to support professional development and capacity building, benefiting from each other's individual skillsets and unique expertise, and elevate the performance of all similar organizations within the community.

Specified Outreach Staff. Establishing a specific position for community outreach, collaboration, and partnership with/connection to other organizations and the VA. While many organizations are heavily resource-constrained, those who designate at least one staff member's sole responsibilities as identifying complementary areas of need for their clients, seeking out the right partners for the organization, identifying a sole point of contact at partner organizations, and managing collaboration, tend to be the most successful at integrating into the community and producing successful outcomes for their clients.

Internal Referral Capacity. Internally creating an integrated web of support. Some very large social services organizations that serve veterans as a component of their broader service population contain such a broad spectrum of services that they are, in a sense, 'community connected' in and of themselves. One organization visited provides a network of services through programs and at locations across multiple counties across which veterans and family members served by its SSVF program can be referred for any number of issues that may accompany the homelessness challenges that the SSVF team is working to overcome.

VA Stand Downs. Participation in VA-sponsored "Stand Down" events which bring a host of community providers together to mass resources in one place for veterans on specific days of the year, to temporarily place all resources in one geographic location as well as to raise veterans' awareness of the breadth of resources available to them. Outside of the "Stand Down" model, some large or highly-prominent organizations provide space within their physical footprint in which other providers can 'rotate through' on a regular basis, serving as a virtual "Stand Down" location, year-round.

Veterans Courts. Connection to veterans courts which seek to treat underlying issues to veteran crime rather than simply pursue punitive action without remediation. These courts often involve participation of numerous providers, who are consulted regarding the best course of action. While courts vary across counties and states, generally organizations either provide an outreach individual who is responsible to liaise with the court on a regular basis, or the court understands the network of organizations in the community and calls on individual organizations as it deems necessary.

Community Resource Guides. Provision of resource handbooks for case managers, volunteers, and reception staff such that each staff member understands the breadth of the organization's community-based network and, while perhaps not able or qualified to assess need and provide referrals, can potentially answer basic questions for inquiring veterans.

Community Connectedness in Practice

The team identified numerous examples of the above-referenced practices across the 25 participating organizations. As mentioned above, the organizations selected for this study represented a broad cross-section of the veterans-services landscape, and thus each organization finds itself at a varying position along the continuum of focus with respect to community connectedness. We highlight a few specific examples across this continuum below.

Swords to Plowshares. One of the nation's oldest veterans' services organizations, Swords to Plowshares, has operated in the San Francisco community since 1974 and began by serving veterans returning from Vietnam. The organization has since evolved into one of San Francisco's leading veterans serving organizations. At the national level, Executive Director Michael Blecker is a founder of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, a convening body for the sharing of leading practices, research, and policy, at which the senior leadership team regularly presents and attends. Statewide, Swords is a founder of the California Association of Veteran Service Agencies, which coordinated successful lobbying efforts in support of Prop 41, a state referendum that reallocated \$600 million of state funding away from its original allocation and toward homeless veterans. Locally, Swords founded San Francisco Homes for Heroes, a collective decision-making group which works with property owners and private institutions to encourage them to rent to veterans with HUD-VASH vouchers and which is working on identifying the most vulnerable veterans and creating a vulnerability index. Recently, through its strong connections with the City of San Francisco, local HUD and VA officials, and major financial institutions, Swords brokered a \$30M real estate development project using surplus property from the city, tax credits, redevelopment loans, government funding, and private funding raised by Swords. While this is just a sampling of Swords' collaborative activity, at each of these levels, the organization's strong leadership in the community and thoroughly networked approach alters the landscape in which it operates, which at the ground level affects the day-to-day life of its clients.

Charlotte Bridge Home. Another organization, Charlotte Bridge Home (CBH), was founded with a community connectedness-focused mission—to help identify veterans' education, employment, and healthcare needs and connect them to community resources that will satisfy them. In fact, the organization's stated vision is to create "a collaborative community strategy to support the employment success of returning veterans in the Charlotte Region" through coordination, communication and connection with the local business community, local government, local colleges and universities, and service providers. One specific practice of note is a coalition of employers that Charlotte Bridge Home

has built to assist its veterans to secure employment, known as the Charlotte Alliance for Veteran Employment (CAVE), which currently has 32 companies enrolled. CAVE members are required to sign Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). To ensure long-term placements, CBH develops an individual employment plan for each CAVE member, identifying employer needs and connecting that employer to qualified applicants from a pool of CBH's veteran clients. Needs for continued education of civilian HR staff members are addressed with CAVE members to overcome any misperceptions or stigmas attached to hiring veterans. By bringing Charlotte's employer community together, training them in the value of hiring veterans and leading practices in doing so, and matching their clientele with the community of employers they have built, Charlotte Bridge Home has demonstrated that their focus on networking within their local community can create greater gains for the veterans they serve.

Goodwill Industries of Houston. An example of a successful physical location, Goodwill Houston made the decision several years ago to pull all of their veterans' programs out of disparate Goodwill locations across Houston and locate them in one centrally located Veteran Workforce Development Center. In the years since, Goodwill's veterans' center has become a major hub for the veterans' services community in Houston. This was due in part to its reputation and vast web of relationships within the community and its hosting of community-wide resource fairs that included community colleges, social services agencies, vocational schools, and other community partners. On site, Goodwill staff mentioned that while outreach was a difficult and time-consuming task in the past, "[Houston] has been trained that you need to be at Goodwill Monday. If [someone] would mention to anybody in this city that they're a veteran, they're going to direct them here. Everyone's sent here and even people that are not. The city knows that we are the premier place to send a veteran." One of the keys to this successful outreach has been a particularly notable tool Goodwill uses to map their desired partners, which they refer to as their "community organizing wheel." This tool plots the mission or desired program outcome in the middle, with different sectors of the community radiating outward, such as government, education, civic, and faith-based. By identifying which partners already exist toward the accomplishment of that mission in that sector and which partners are missing, Goodwill Houston identifies target partners and begins developing relationships for future work. With a centrally located physical location serving as the hub of a network of strategically selected partners, Goodwill's Veterans Workforce Development Center draws both veterans and service providers from across the community to their location, serving as a "clearinghouse" of sorts and increasing efficiencies for both populations.

Hire Heroes USA. Some organizations make a conscious decision to focus primarily on one area of veteran need and thus forgo a strategy of broadly integrating into a formal web of support. Hire Heroes USA, for example, is intensely focused on preparing veterans and transitioning servicemembers to seek and obtain employment. This organization believes that diverting the attention of its staff toward assessing other forms of need for the veterans it serves and attempting to identify supporting organizations would be harmful to the organization and the veterans it serves by degrading the quality of the services it provides. Their high-touch model of Veteran Transition Specialists spending hours with each veteran on their resume and coaching them on interview skills would be less impactful, they believe, if their staff's time were spent otherwise. Hire Heroes CEO Brian Stann emphasizes that, "We're going to stay narrowly focused, because what happens a lot of times with nonprofits and the reason they go out of business so quickly, is they try to accomplish too many things and they're not really that good at any of them...[They say] 'We should also do this. We should help them with that' ...

You know, look, guys, we're Hire Heroes USA, let's help them get jobs. Let's be really good at doing that. Let's become experts in this area and focus on that because it cures a lot of these other problems." Of note, Hire Heroes USA has recently hired a recovery care coordinator to put together a 'playbook' of organizations to refer their veterans in case they have needs outside of HHUSA's employment focus. The organization has established a partnership with one organization—Hope for the Warriors—in case any of their veterans need support with post-traumatic stress and financial distress.

Outside of organizations like Hire Heroes USA, which define their mission narrowly to focus on excellence in their area of expertise, two organizations included in this study serve as examples to which our definition of community connectedness seems impractical due to their service delivery model. American Corporate Partners relies upon accomplished business people to serve as mentors for veterans seeking employment advice and advancement. Most of these volunteers are not veterans themselves and have no experience in veterans' services, nor do they possess understanding of the multiple issues that the veterans they serve may be experiencing outside of the employment challenges they are working on with their individual veteran protégé. Likewise, Project Healing Waters fly-fishing relies upon professional fishing guides and experienced anglers to lead fishing trips for veterans and servicemembers on military installations. This organization is similarly focused on their guides' expertise in fly-fishing rather than the broader landscape of veterans services. For both of these organizations, it is not only impractical but likely irresponsible to expect that they would step outside of their narrow mission and attempt to train their volunteers to detect issues outside of their narrow focus, to try to identify needed referrals, or to attempt to serve as advisors to where a veteran might find quality services elsewhere.

Both of these examples highlight an important research finding that, while community connectedness is important, there also exists a market for organizations that either intentionally define a narrow focus to optimize organizational performance, or organizations that form a "niche" within the landscape of services, leveraging the volunteer services of those otherwise unqualified to link veterans elsewhere. If one envisions the landscape of services as a web, organizations referenced above might serve as central 'hubs' and connectors, whereas these more specialized organizations, possessing unique value to the veterans' community, might sit on the periphery with less responsibility or ability to connect to others.

Further Insights

Acknowledging the breadth of types of organizations included in the study, some characteristics of organizations appeared to drive the desire or need to collaborate. Perhaps predictably, collaboration for programmatic rather than strategic purposes seems more critical for more community-based organizations as compared to those with a national focus. Brick and mortar operations where a homeless veteran can walk through the door have much less ability to be territorial—they cannot afford to refuse to partner with a 'competitor' if it means forgoing the ability to place a homeless veteran in a bed the same day he or she walks in the door, for example. The critical need for an organization to collaborate, therefore, is almost directly proportional to the critical nature of the needs of the veterans that an organization serves.

Additionally, the research team identified that one driver of collaboration was not only the notion that veterans often have multiple and interrelated issues, but that organizations recognize the complex nature of the issues relative to the specific mission of their organization. In practice, an organization may understand that while a veteran may be coming to them seeking emergency financial assistance, there may be other factors at play that

led to the veteran's financial instability (mental health challenges, for example). Accordingly, it is irresponsible of that organization not to identify a set of partners to treat the underlying causes of this instability, both for the goodwill of the veteran and, from a practical perspective, to prevent the veteran from seeking further assistance in the future. Likewise, the financial services organization may understand that financial instability may cause a host of other issues (such as family instability or further decreased mental or physical health), in this case potentially placing a moral burden on the organization to partner to treat the secondary or tertiary effects of the issues they are treating.

Social Connectedness Themes

To investigate social connectedness across the 25 participating organizations, the research team focused on the strategies and methods by which the organization bridged the 'civilian-military divide' through engagement with and between community members and organizations and their transitioning veteran clients. After determining whether organizations perceived the existence of a civilian-military divide as a concern, researchers explored how the organizations helped their transitioning servicemembers and families better understand civilian society and how it is governed by principles and value systems different from the military. The team also examined strategies the organizations used to educate non-veterans (e.g., members of the community, other service providers, employers, and law enforcement officials) about the strengths, challenges, issues, and concerns of veterans and their families, and to integrate veterans and their families into their communities through development of supportive and meaningful relationships.

Trends and Observations in the Field

Examination and analysis of 25 organizations providing services to veterans and military families yields a range of methods and opportunities for these organizations to advance societal understanding of the veterans they serve. However, deliberate, strategic efforts to bridge the civilian-military divide in a manner that transforms relationships and empowers those who served are rare, compared to broader, well-intended, yet trifling efforts to "get people involved," that, at best, expose people to veterans. This nuance is important to note and is reflected across the 25 organizations.

Three groups of organizations emerged from the research related to social connectedness. One group of organizations act to bridge the divide through direct shaping of community perceptions of veterans. The second group of organizations likely draws attention to veterans generally, but, as a group, does not intentionally shape perceptions to bridge the civilian-military divide. An important element driving this finding is that organizations have limited resources to dedicate to the areas of highest priority. So, while educating the general public might be on an ideal list of organizational goals, unless doing so is central to the organization's mission, or the organization has significant enough capacity to undertake projects specifically designed to bridge the civilian-military divide, it is unlikely that these organizations will expend resources on doing so. Accordingly, many organizations do not deliberately work to bridge the civilian-military divide as a stated aspect of their mission. In executing their day-to-day activities, however, it becomes evident that their work is producing such an outcome. The third group of organizations is found not to bridge an informational gap, but to bridge an *awareness* gap by providing short-term opportunities for members of the public to engage with the mission of the organization in a "low-touch" manner, such as volunteering or donating.

These three groups are explained in further detail below:

Deliberate Relationship Builders. These organizations have consciously identified a divide between the civilian and military and veteran populations and have established efforts to bridge this divide, through a number of methods. Some organizations have been entirely designed around this concept, focused on integrating veterans into their communities, connecting them with non-veterans through teamwork (e.g., through volunteer or fitness activities), seeking to build interpersonal trust and relationships between the two communities at an individual level. Other organizations have identified “friction points” in society, where civilians’ lack of understanding for military and veterans’ concerns lead to degraded service quality (in physical or behavioral health, or in social services for example), heightened danger during interactions with law enforcement officials, ineffective sentencing and treatment programs sanctioned in courts, decreased educational and employment outcomes, and generally increased stresses and challenges for veterans in day-to-day life. These organizations create training programs to work with relevant parties mentioned above to improve processes and quality of veterans’ engagement with services, or work to improve local law enforcement’s awareness of their programs such that the organization might be notified of disturbances or issues prior to legal action being taken with a veteran enrolled in one of their programs.

Finally, as a critical element of their mission, many employment-focused organizations deliberately identify and work to bridge this divide through education and relationship building, on both sides of the employment equation: both the employer and the veteran seeking employment. While developing networks of employers willing to hire veterans, these organizations spend considerable effort teaching companies the value, or business case, of hiring veterans, as well as working to dispel myths, stigmas, and stereotypes associated with the veteran experience. In addition, while many organizations work with veterans to translate their military experience into language that civilian employers can understand (in the context of both resume writing and interview preparation), several work with veterans to view themselves through the civilian employment lens, as to how they would behave in their new civilian roles. These organizations encourage veterans to introduce themselves to their new coworkers and integrate themselves into the team, as well as to work to develop an image within their new companies as “John, my coworker,” as opposed to solely (or primarily) “John, the veteran.” These organizations also work with employees and companies through potential leadership challenges, as some former military leaders can be rigid or “short” in communication with their new team members; organizations such as these coach their veterans to understand and employ new, “softer” leadership techniques to which their civilian co-workers might better respond.

Secondary Relationship Builders. A second category of organizations has not explicitly set out to design programming intended to bridge the civilian-military divide, but through its regular programming, has learned that this secondary effect exists. Potentially, these organizations, having identified this secondary effect, have taken efforts to expand upon it for the good of their veterans or for veterans in general, but “bridging the divide” is still not the primary focus of the organization’s programming. For example, Warrior Canine Connection has servicemembers and veterans train future service dogs in public. Each dog’s vest, labeled “Service Dog In-Training” often draws attention to the dog and trainer, sparking conversation between civilians and the servicemembers about the dogs, the mission of the organization, challenges veterans face, etc. The trainers can therefore serve as ambassadors for

the program, and educators for the community at large. While this is not an intended effect of WCC programming, bridging the civ-mil divide is a positive outcome. Likewise, American Corporate Partners pairs mentors with veterans and transitioning servicemembers seeking advice and information about employment in the civilian business world. While the focus of the program is to provide mentorship and enhanced employment outcomes for participating veterans, an added effect of the program is educating the civilian mentors about the experiences of the servicemembers and veterans. Often the mentors recruit their peers to also participate in the program and pass along anecdotes of their experiences to others, which further closes the gap between an otherwise potentially unengaged section of the business community.

Public Mobilizers. A third category of organizations serves to bridge the divide not through consistent or thorough engagement between the civilian and military populations, but through activating, motivating, or harnessing the general public's goodwill for the military and veteran community. These organizations provide "one-time," public displays of support for veterans and their families, such as hosting holiday celebrations, marching in parades, setting up displays or booths at large public fairs, producing public service announcements, garnering media attention, hosting fundraising events, giving way homes at high-profile concerts or sporting events, or hosting public displays of support in airports or at professional sporting events which serve to draw public attention to the military and veteran community. These organizations also offer "low-touch" volunteer opportunities, such as serving a Thanksgiving meal on a military base, mailing care packages, writing letters to deployed servicemembers, donating money or goods. These displays of support and opportunities for engagement are not necessarily educational in nature and therefore do not serve the purpose of bridging the "informational divide" regarding public understanding of the military and veteran experience, including the strengths, issues, and challenges contained therein, but rather these displays bridge an "awareness divide," by continuing to remind the American public that our military is at war and our veterans are returning home. Some of these organizations are able to use high-volume, low-touch connections to the civilian community to translate public goodwill into financial resources which help sustain the organization in lieu of other grant funding.

[A Continuum of Focus: Primary and Secondary Relationship Builders](#)

Among organizations developing programming specifically designed to bridge the civilian-military divide is Swords to Plowshares, which has developed a suite of training known as Combat to Community. This program educates various segments of the community about the challenges and opportunities that veterans face when transitioning into society, as well as develops familiarity with veteran and military culture. Training audiences include physical, behavioral, and mental health care workers, social workers, police, first responders, court personnel, parole and probation officers, lawyers, judges, educators, the faith community, and employers. Some trainees are able to get continuing education credit for their participation, such as police officers, for whom the training is certified through the California Commission on Police Officers Standards and Training. Training is tailored toward the audience. For example, police officers and first responders are taught to interact with veterans in crisis situations and to understand what to expect when interacting with a veteran who may be suffering from PTSD or TBI. During training for judges or other court officials, Swords serves in a policy leadership role, helping the court system understand antecedents of maladaptive veteran behavior and providing recommendations as to treatment or referral options. For lawyers, Swords has hosted formal trainings as well as informal events

they nicknamed “Everything You Wanted To Ask Your Client But It Would Be Incredibly Inappropriate,” to help lawyers understand their clients better. Finally, Swords’ training for employers works to break down stigma surrounding disability and PTSD, explain military skillsets, encourage the establishment of veteran peer mentor groups, and highlight the business case for hiring veterans.

Team Red, White, and Blue (Team RWB) serves as an example organization that was founded with a near-explicit mission of bridging the civilian-military divide: “To enrich the lives of America’s veterans by connecting them to their community through physical and social activity.” Having identified the loss of a sense of belonging in transitioning servicemembers and veterans, Team RWB seeks to fill this gap not only by connecting veterans to each other, but by bridging the gap between them and the members of their community at the local chapter level. The current ratio of membership in the organization is approximately two-thirds veterans to one-third civilians, so within each chapter, veterans are getting to know non-veterans through direct interaction. Additionally, chapters participate in social and volunteer activities out in the community, further incorporating community members in their activities. One unique aspect of the RWB experience is the bright red t-shirt, which to some may seem like a surface element of participating in the team. While this helps bond the team together by serving as a “uniform,” it also has a secondary effect of sparking curiosity in those who see the team as they participate in their activities, thus serving as an outreach tool to members of the community-at-large. Whether in a race or at a BBQ, seeing a large group in red with an American flag often attracts onlookers who ask, “What is this group?” “What kind of team is this?” or “What are you training for?” This opens the opportunity for a conversation about Team RWB, a chance to invite more members of the community into the group, and a moment to explain some of the strengths and challenges that veterans face and can bring to society.

Executive Director Blayne Smith describes Team RWB as a “community of communities,” meaning that it not only operates at a local grassroots level in program delivery, but also serves on a national level and as a national community. For members who might live in a city where no RWB chapter or organizing community is currently available, they can still participate in regional or national events. Through offering a frequent variety of physical and social activities, veteran participants interact directly with members of the local community and a social framework is thus created by providing veterans with a sense of camaraderie, purpose, and sense of accomplishment. By holding events at both local and national levels, Team RWB gains public exposure and social connectedness. One of the largest national events is the WOD for Warriors (WOD standing for ‘workout of the day’), held twice a year on Veterans Day and Memorial Day. Participation takes place at all of the local chapters. Additionally, the Old Glory Relay launched on September 11, 2014 involved chapter members running with an American flag from the VA Hospital in San Francisco to the Walter Reed hospital in Washington, DC. Members from the local chapters were invited to participate in this national event, which gained broad attention within the communities that the flag and relay runners passed through. The event highlighted the organization, but more importantly, veterans’ strengths as opposed to any perceived weaknesses or challenges they may face. Both of these events again provide genuine opportunities for veterans and non-veterans to connect on a social and informal level and help build a culture of support, encouragement, and inclusivity beyond the confines of the military.

Similarly, the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) works to break down barriers for military children in school districts across America through their programming, which connects civilian and military-connected children, parents, educators, and administrators. MCEC recognizes that students who are connected with their peers, schools, and communities, have higher graduation rates, higher academic attainment and lower

detering incidences during their school age years—such that bridging the civilian military divide is not just about creating cultural unity but rather about facilitating the academic success of military children as well. Through the Educating the Educators programs, the organization helps administrators and educators identify and understand the idiosyncratic needs of military students and help these children integrate into the school district successfully. Programs like Parent 2 Parent and Student 2 Student train non-military connected parents and students to identify these differences and needs, connect military-connected families with their peers, and facilitate the pairing of peer guides to welcome these military families into schools and districts, aiding their navigation of new systems and processes, and introducing them to new social circles—similar to a “sponsor family” that the military family might receive on-base.

Finally, Team Rubicon serves as an example of an organization that never set out to bridge the civilian-military divide, but has learned through experience that their mission serves as a catalyst for connecting veterans and those they serve, as well as potentially serving as an advocate for opportunities for veterans in the future. In deploying veterans as first responders to natural disasters, these veteran teams naturally interact with members of the communities that they serve—and the communities learn about the veterans’ commitment to service, humility, and leadership ability. Team Rubicon’s veterans demonstrate that they are civic assets not through their words but by their deeds. In the process, they are also often charged with managing civilian volunteers, which creates further opportunities for interaction.

Director of Field Operations Vince Moffitt tells the story of a veteran who was surprised to learn that civilians in New York wanted to hear his story:

“In Sandy, we accidentally jumped into volunteer management. We weren’t going to do that. So a lot of people were like, ‘Hey, I said I wanted to be with my brothers in arms, and now you give me a bunch of civilians, and I have to take these guys out for the day.’ This guy comes in from the field, and I said, ‘Hey, how was your day?’ He goes, ‘Man, it was awesome.’ I said, ‘What was so good about it?’ and he said, ‘Lunch.’ I thought he was joking, and he goes, ‘Man, we had MREs for lunch, and I had this group of kids, and we sat down with these college kids, and I showed them how to eat the MRE. And we were sitting there, and then they asked me about my experience in Afghanistan and sincerely asked me. No one ever asked me that before, and they asked me how I felt and what my opinion was on it. It was an experience I’ve never had before.”

Likewise, in discovering effect their work has on bridging the civilian-military divide, Team Rubicon leadership are working to harness this to advance the employment outcomes of all veterans. By expanding the organization’s reach nationwide, Team Rubicon hopes that potential employers will see the value of the post-9/11 generation as a whole, and when faced with a hiring decision, will look more favorably on veterans than they had before. Director of Program Operations Matt Runyon explains: “If we’re able to show that

veterans can continue to be those leaders in the community in addition to just doing just good work, [then we can change the narrative] ...And if you can start changing the narrative, someone that saw Team Rubicon but doesn't know this veteran from any veteran but comes in and applies for the job, maybe they saw the vignette on Team Rubicon, and they're like, 'I'm going to give this guy a chance because I saw what those vets are doing.'" Team Rubicon believes that by increasing public awareness of and respect for their veterans, general public consciousness of all veterans will improve.

Further Insights

A common challenge for organizations seeking to bridge the civilian-military divide is the lack of a tangible or concrete metric to determine the true impact of their efforts. While employment-focused organizations could potentially use the metric of number of veterans employed as a proxy for their efforts to educate employers, the impact of their education and outreach efforts on the mindset of an HR executive or front-line hiring manager is difficult to determine. Likewise, organizations seeking to integrate veterans into their communities, build teamwork, and increase understanding between veterans and non-veterans may use event attendance or chapter membership as a proxy for success, but the level of meaningful engagement between veteran and non-veteran members, or the impact that their organization has had on civilian society as a whole is ambiguous at best. Ultimately, it is up to the organizations most focused on influencing this divide—those the research team has labeled “deliberate relationship builders”—to identify the best metrics that will determine their success. For “secondary relationship builders” and others, it is unlikely that the effect of their programming would be measured at all. In short, the concept of increasing societal awareness and consciousness of military and veterans’ issues—while worthy of effort—is nebulous and success is difficult to define.

When discussing the notion of bridging the civilian military divide through incorporating non-veterans into an organization’s mission, it is important to discuss the potential for selection bias, which could mitigate the “bridging” impact of said involvement. As mentioned above, many organizations bridge the civilian-military divide by incorporating volunteers into their operations; likewise, one might argue that through the act of fundraising, organizations also can bridge this divide by affording non-veterans a way to engage in the work of supporting veterans and their families. Throughout conversations with leaders, staff, and volunteers across the surveyed organizations, however, it became evident that many volunteers and individual donors are motivated to become involved with veteran-serving organizations due to a personal connection with the cause – perhaps a parent or sibling has served in the military, or the individual is a veteran themselves. As a result, the strength of the assertion that through volunteer and donor support, the organization is bridging a divide is somewhat mitigated, because the volunteers and donors already sit on the “informed” and “engaged” side of the divide. While volunteer outreach coordinators and development staff could use these two organizational functions as outreach efforts to intentionally seek volunteers and donors not already connected to the military (and thus bridge the divide), such efforts would likely be an inefficient use of limited resources better directed toward the critical needs of the organization. In practice, veterans services at the organizations surveyed are mostly delivered by professionals and volunteers who have some connection to (and therefore prior awareness of) military and veterans’ issues, and are financially supported by donors who have the same.

Finally, it should be noted that an entire category of organizations which was not included in this study exists solely to help veterans share their stories with the public, and these organizations perhaps perform one of the most direct methods of bridging the civilian-military divide. Organizations which encourage veterans to express themselves through art, music, poetry, writing, any other expressive medium, or oral history projects in museums

and online, all seek to increase engagement of non-veterans with the military experience. As above, while there is a potential selection bias for those non-veterans who choose to engage with these project—in that these individuals are likely at least somewhat aware of the strengths, issues, and challenges related to our nation’s veterans and military families—there still exists potential for these efforts to inform the broader general public and to have some effect on the civilian-military divide.

Independent Sector Engagement Themes

For this theme, the research team explored the current state of independent sector collaboration across the 25 participating organizations. The extent and nature of collaborative donor partnerships and the organizations’ perceived importance of these relationships to their success (or survival) were of particular interest to our team as well. Unlike “community connectedness,” the partnerships examined in this section do not focus on collaboration related to programming execution (e.g., referral networks). Rather, the partnerships examined in this section are strategic in that they support the organization’s survival and mission accomplishment.

Trends and Observations in the Field

Unsurprisingly, examination of the 25 participating organizations reveals a consistent pattern of reliance upon strategic relationships with the private and philanthropic sectors and of each other. Whether for financial support, supplies, pro bono services, advice and consultation, placement of veterans trained by non-profits, or sharing complementary services, these strategic partnerships have enabled organizational success by providing non-profits with resources and expertise to which they would not have otherwise had access.

Direct Donor Support. While government funding forms the core of our nation’s social safety net for veterans, this support generally extends only as far as non-profits that provide transitional housing, workforce development training, and substance abuse assistance. For those not receiving government funding—i.e., VA SSVF grants, HUD VASH vouchers, DOL HVRP grants, SAMHSA veterans support or Department of Defense contracts—securing private sector or philanthropic support is necessary for survival. The most nationally prominent organizations in this study generally courted the same set of veteran-focused foundations, corporations, and financial institutions for support, namely, the Bob Woodruff Foundation, Newman’s Own Foundation, Walmart Foundation, JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, and Wells Fargo. Even so, these corporate and foundation dollars at times found their way to local, community based non-profits too. More commonly, however, community-based non-profits competed for funding from local family foundations or local corporations, each of which would have a greater commitment to their specific constituency of veterans. Two organizations included in this study—Hire Heroes USA and the Steven and Alexandria Cohen Military Family Clinic—were founded by a major founding benefactor (MedAssets and Steven and Alexandria Cohen, respectively), then added additional funding sources as the organizations grew. These major initial gifts provided the organizations the flexibility to establish themselves and pursue additional funding sources without having to fight for survival.

In-kind Donations. In addition to relying upon the independent sector for funding opportunities, non-profits whose operations require significant amounts of supplies—to support homeless shelters, care packages, or respite centers at airports—relied heavily upon private sector supporters for materiel support. Soldiers’ Angels relies upon key support from several corporations that provide monetary

and in kind donations of supplies, warehouse space, shipping capabilities, and employee volunteers. Soldiers' Angels is the charity of choice for Mary Kay, which provides items that are included in hygiene kits. Harry & David provides trail mix, also used in care packages. Other corporate supporters include Books-A-Million/Barnes & Noble, Walmart, Girl Scouts of America, Pepsi, Wells Fargo, and American Express. Three Hots and a Cot described their networked supply system wherein large quantities of items—e.g., food, bedding, and construction supplies—are donated to their organization. The network of similar non-profits in the surrounding area also trades their surplus internally to ensure that each has what is required. Volunteers at USO of Illinois recounted the daily process of picking up food and supplies from local businesses to sustain USO centers at Chicago's airports and on Naval Station Great Lakes. Large scale or small, it became clear that without donations of such supplies from private sector partners, each of these organizations would not be able to sustain their operations.

Pro Bono Services. Private sector partners also provide a range of pro bono services that support non-profit operations and service delivery. Seeking to better understand the population it served but not having the research and evaluation capability to do so, Team Red, White, and Blue partnered with leading management consulting firm McKinsey & Co. to conduct a broad-reaching survey of its members. Through the Google Reach Program, Swords to Plowshares had two Google employees visit their offices as volunteers to update Swords' communications platforms, Google Analytics, Google AdWords, and assist with search engine optimization. This partnership helped Swords assess their brand, web, and social media presence and instill tracking mechanisms to assess performance. Swords has also benefitted from extensive partnerships with local law firms to expand its legal services capacities through pro bono support. Finally, several employment providers noted that private sector partners have volunteered to conduct mock interviews with their clients, which serve as a more effective means of job search preparation than having a student's regular instructors participate. In all of these instances, non-profits have leveraged private sector expertise to augment, enhance, or establish an organizational expertise necessary to ensure strong outcomes for their clients.

Consultation. Similar to pro bono support, non-profits often draw on private sector expertise for advice and consultation. Organizations throughout this study noted that their boards were mostly comprised of local private sector leaders who could advise them in organizational management and strategy, finance, and communications, aside from their roles in assisting the non-profit with fundraising. In addition, local private sector leaders are at times consulted in the development of employment programs to both assess the need for and efficacy of specific programs and their design. Goodwill Houston has established what it calls its Business Advisory Council, comprised of local employers, and charged with advising their workforce development programs. Upon development of a new program, Goodwill staff presents the idea to the council for questions and feedback from the private sector perspective, serving as a form of quality assurance element from the "consumers" of the workforce produced by Goodwill's curriculum. In both of these cases, private sector expertise is leveraged to ensure that not only are the non-profits being run effectively but that, in the case of employment programs, they are doing relevant work which aligns with business interests and is, therefore, in the best interests of the veteran clients themselves.

Cross-Sector Strategic Partnerships. Employer partnerships are not only necessary for the advisement and development of effective employment programs, but without strategic relationships with the private

sector, non-profits advocating for the hiring of veterans and their families would undoubtedly fail. The nation's largest employers have made significant public commitments to hiring hundreds of thousands of veterans, and any employment focused non-profit must build relationships to leverage this demand on behalf of their veterans. However, this may be more difficult for community-based non-profits, so these organizations must develop their own networks and coalitions. Charlotte Bridge Home, for example, has developed the Charlotte Alliance for Veteran Employment (CAVE), which includes 32 employers across the region interested in hiring veterans. Both national and local organizations, this alliance ensures that employers are trained in effective processes for recruiting veterans, and that they are linked to a pipeline of veterans graduating from Charlotte Bridge Home's programs. Such a partnership with the private sector is vital to the success of any employment-focused non-profit.

Within-Sector Strategic Partnerships. Finally, strategic collaboration between non-profits themselves was also a critical enabler of success for the organizations included in this study. As non-profits identified strengths in potential partners which they sought to incorporate into their model, or potentially identified weaknesses in their own model that they felt another organization could shore up, partnerships have arisen where complementary strengths serve both organizations well. One clear example of this Give an Hour, which has donated one full-time psychologist to Team Rubicon, which had noted a need for mental health services for its members. This partnership has been so successful that Team Rubicon will fund the position moving forward, and is hoping to expand the program to hire more mental health professionals to distribute throughout the country. Team Rubicon has also identified a need to keep its team members engaged between disaster relief deployments, so the organization has partnered with Habitat for Humanity to participate in home builds to both keep Team Rubicon members' skills sharp and maintain their sense of purpose. Likewise, Team Rubicon has partnered with Team RWB as a further provider of camaraderie and sense of identity which Team Rubicon members have on deployment but which they may lose between operations, and the loss of which can degrade their mental health. Likewise, Team RWB veterans get exposure to Team Rubicon and are able to participate on deployments, providing them an opportunity to participate in missions of which they might not have otherwise been aware. Through this series of strategic relationships, Team Rubicon and its partners each leverage their strengths, expand their reach, and better serve their veterans.

Partnerships in Practice

USO of Illinois. The USO of Illinois is largely dependent on relationships with the private and philanthropic sectors to execute its broad swath of programming for the Illinois' servicemembers community and the thousands who pass through Chicago's airports each year. From governance to funding and donation of space, supplies, and funding, the USO of Illinois' relies on an extensive web of relationships.

The private sector plays a heavy influence in the governance of the organization. The USO of Illinois' 50-person board of directors, many of whom are executives from local companies, is regularly involved in the operation of the organization. The board consists of directors possessing a diverse set of professional skills and affiliations who serve on committees dedicated to operational areas such as finance, development, public relations, marketing, and human resources and whose oversight and advice are vital to the organization. In terms of financial and materiel support, with 69 percent of its annual support and revenue derived from in-kind donations, daily cooperation with the independent sector is required for the organization to succeed in its mission. Although each program benefits from in-kind donations, the 2013 annual report indicates that 84 percent of

the organization's annual operating expenses are associated with the USO Centers at Chicago airports and two military installations in Illinois, suggesting that Center Programs consume the largest proportion of in-kind donations. Donations supporting the Center Programs are the spaces they occupy, associated furnishings, operational supplies and food served, which alone totals over \$1,000 per week.

Another of the programs that would not exist without the close cooperation of local businesses is the Tickets for Troops program. This program occupies the majority of the program staff's time and accounts for approximately 15,000 in donated tickets annually at an approximate value of \$500,000. Through this program, tickets are solicited by the program staff for sporting events, concerts, theatrical performances and other cultural events occurring at venues throughout the state, but primarily in or around Chicago. Their effort is assisted through an engaged Board of Directors including Directors who own or are employed by organizations such as the Ravinia outdoor music festival and the Chicago Blackhawks. The organization further benefits as they rely on the relationships built with businesses through the program to respond to additional areas of need and create new programs. Examples of this are the Bears Cares programs, military appreciation days, and AT&T and the Chicago Bulls sponsoring a pre-game basketball session for veterans with former championship players Bill Wellington and Stacey King.

The organization has also worked to provide opportunities for local corporations and their employees to participate directly in the programs they sponsor. One example is the No-Dough Dinner, in which "[The companies] can send folks from their organization to actually serve the meal or greet the sailors as they come in or interact with them at the USO." The staff explains that programs of this type are developed through a collaborative process and evolve over time as the relationships with their business partners grow closer.

USO of Illinois serves as one example an organization bringing together relationships from across a large metropolitan area to enable programming for thousands of servicemembers each year. Without these relationships with the private sector and the generosity of private philanthropy, the USO Illinois would be challenged to maintain its current scope of programming.

Further Insights

Some non-profit organizations surveyed in this study noted that their relationships with private sector organizations served as a potential source of volunteers or that their private sector partners and funders continually sought volunteer opportunities within their organizations. However, discussions with the majority of non-profits in this study on the use of volunteers revealed that the average organization requires consistent volunteers with specific, dedicated skills. In addition, the organizations work best with a dedicated volunteer management strategy. Large, one-off influxes of untrained volunteers are often inappropriate for the type of sensitive work that these organizations do. This may cause friction at times with funders wishing to volunteer, so relationship management and stewardship is critical.

Veteran Programming Differentiation Themes

To assess veteran programming differentiation across the 25 participating organizations, our research team evaluated the participants' varying strengths in addressing specific needs across different veteran cohorts—e.g., veterans of different eras, grades, gender, or health and wellness-related concerns. We also explored whether any accommodations unique to a cohort have led to success, failure, or mixed outcomes. Further, our research team attempted to identify any noteworthy practices that might be informative to VSNPs on a specific veteran cohort or related programming.

Trends and Observations in the Field

As a caveat, the research team anticipated discovering a significant degree of differentiated programming at the outset given the diversity of organizations and respective programs already designed for specific cohorts. For example, much like the VAs OEF/OIF- and women-specific case management programs, the research team anticipated discovering similarly designed teams or programs across the 25 cases. In the field, the team found the following:

- *The broad landscape of veterans services in America remains dominated by the need to serve members of pre-9/11 generations since they comprise the significant demographic majority of veterans. These organizations sometimes formally differentiate programming for women veterans and for post-9/11 veterans, but these cohorts are served largely within the context of programming designed and delivered for the broad category of “veterans,” without regard to service era.*
- *A subset of VSNPs specifically dedicated to serving post-9/11 veterans has emerged. Some provide formally differentiated programming for women veterans, or veterans with disabilities, though (anecdotally) this is rare. Data on this subset is presently unavailable to generalize broadly.*
- *An additional category of organizations specifically dedicated to serving veterans with disabilities has emerged. Regrettably, too few of these organizations were included in this study to make reliable assertions about the status of differentiation within.*

An important finding is that formal differentiation of programming often aligns with (or is driven by) donor goals and eligibility criteria rather than organizational vision or expertise. For the few cases in which funders had expressed desires to serve specific cohorts, the cohorts were either active servicemembers (veterans were ineligible), veterans with disabilities, women veterans, or post-9/11 veterans. For cases in which organizational expertise, in fact, drives formal program differentiation, it is the result of the organizations’ proactive and successful fundraising for the program. It appears extremely rare that VSNPs have the financial slack to offer differentiated programming (i.e., establish new programs) without external support.

Differentiation is often informal in practice. It stems mostly from staff cultural competency and talent acquisition within programming constraints directed by funders. While a program may be funded for all veterans, for example, staffing the program with a diverse group of veterans (e.g., pre-/post-9/11, male/female, etc.) may lead to a more uniquely tailored and differentiated client-customer experience, even if the program itself does not explicitly call for differentiated services. Most organizations noted that, although they did not explicitly differentiate by program, they strongly felt that they provided differentiated services in that they had uniquely tailored case management processes or were responsive to each individual veteran’s specific needs because their of diverse and culturally attuned staff. Successful fundraising for differentiated programs has also risen out of the clear value articulation for differentiation (e.g., a privately-funded women homelessness grant that was inspired by an organization demonstrating the success of a team of women-focused staff within a broader, gender-agnostic, government-funded HVRP program).

Notably, like a marketplace, the unique concerns of specific veteran cohorts appear to be driving formal and informal differentiation. The research team heard repeated stories of organizations learning the importance of differentiation through trial and error. For example, acknowledging the prevalence of combat trauma among their clientele, multiple organizations have learned to accommodate stressors in unique and specific ways, such as leaving doors open, preventing loud noises, and ensuring the veteran does not sit with their back to the door. Acknowledging the traumatic experiences faced by many women veterans and their resulting difficulty

trusting male veterans or potential difficulty trusting male staff, multiple organizations have established women-only staff or set aside spaces within their physical footprint for a safe, welcoming, women-friendly environment. Acknowledging the significantly different post-9/11 veteran skills, experiences, and employment goals compared to their pre-9/11 counterparts, many organizations have established entirely new and different training protocols, networks of employers, and outreach strategies to accommodate this new population.

These lessons learned from practitioners in the field not only present rich and valuable insights into the practice of serving veterans but also shed light on common characteristics of the veterans themselves. While the research team's goal was to focus on the post-9/11 cohort, as noted above, many of the organizations included in this study actually serve a majority of pre-9/11 veterans, so conversations often illuminated differences between pre- and post-9/11 veterans. Veteran-serving organizations should account for this when either designing services or when training staff on veteran cultural competency matters. Select examples include:

Sensitivity to Age. Organizations have learned to be sensitive to the environment, culture, and even physical space in which they deliver programs—specifically, that it not “feel old.” Younger veterans may be especially averse to programs that appear dominated by older veterans. One staff member described a scenario in which a young veteran walks into their waiting room, only to find it full of old men, and think to him- or herself, “this isn’t for me,” and seek services elsewhere or not at all.

Focus of Support. Younger veterans seeking social services tend to struggle with the building blocks of post-service life—education, stable employment, perhaps deployment-related mental health issues, substance abuse, and subsequent housing challenges. They often require “course correction” to be set on a better future path and early intervention can effectively treat, if not reverse their troubles. Older veterans seeking social services, however, tend to be dealing with similar issues (employment, mental health, substance abuse, housing), but these issues are chronic and, thus, treatment strategies focused more on reduction of severity rather than full-scale rehabilitation.

Employment Strategies. Teams working with veterans seeking education and employment have learned to develop quite different training protocol and strategies for the different generations. Post-9/11 veterans were characterized as having higher technical skillsets and higher (sometimes unrealistic) wage expectations due to their military experience compared to older generations. These veterans are typically qualified for more jobs than their older counterparts are and are seeking careers rather than jobs. This sometimes translates into in higher wage targets for post-9/11 specific employment programs. Conversely, employment programs for the pre-9/11 cohort focus on helping veterans earn a living wage, rather than a new career in the modern economy, and even this can be challenging. Older veterans, particularly the chronically homeless, have significant challenges working with technology and are sometimes reluctant to ask for help simply because they are embarrassed at their lack of knowledge.

With regard to organizations serving the post-9/11 cohort specifically, differences emerged in service delivery models between the populations of the Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve, and veteran populations. During interviews, it became evident that there is a growing struggle between resource allocation and impact among programming for these Guard and Reserve Units. The distance between smaller, rural Guard and Reserve units from their organizations' main headquarters and the distance between the smaller units, Guard/Reserve

servicemembers, and veterans from each another in rural settings, add a layers of complexity to programming not present near Active duty installations or urban settings where more veterans congregate. For rural Guard/Reserve servicemembers and families, organizations can coordinate their programming with drill dates but often do not find their efforts nearly as impactful overall as those for Active Duty servicemembers and families on installations.

Organizations serving these populations must develop more innovative service delivery models to reach these populations, perhaps requiring virtual tools or requiring mobile assistance. For example, one SSVF organization visited mentioned a fellow member of the local SSVF community of practice that has no brick and mortar location but rather operates entirely out of mobile vans.

Finally,²² conversations with leaders and staff surrounding this concept of differentiation included the identification of broad differences between providing human services to veterans versus providing the same categories of human services to non-veterans. As a result, these conversations also led to the emergence of several insights idiosyncratic of the veteran community such as:

Resistance to Seeking Services. Many organizations reported a general sense of pride exhibited by all generations—often cited as ingrained in them through the resourcefulness they learned in their military training—which leads them to believe, “I’m fine, I don’t need help,” regardless of how dire a situation in which they find themselves. This often leads veterans who *do* seek social services to wait until a point of crisis to do so.

Unique Employment Challenges. Veterans at all levels of the military rank structure face unique challenges in communicating their military skills and experiences to employers, as well as overcoming the stigma associated with stereotypes regarding combat trauma and associated mental health challenges such as PTS and depression.

Difficulty Integrating with Non-veterans. Multiple organizations cited some veterans’ difficulties navigating cultural differences between military and civilian society. Referred to as “rough edges” or a “chip on their shoulder,” some veterans’ pride in their service can be perceived, at times, as disregard toward those who have not served or, as stated by one staff member, “I don’t need to cooperate. I’ve done my piece.” For those veterans in the workforce placed in leadership positions over non-veterans, this can at times lead to impatience with complaints or uneven work ethic, which can sometimes require mediation between an employment services provider, the employer, and the veteran. For other veterans, this can simply lead them to be less willing to integrate into society and seek isolation, which may further exacerbate any existing mental health issues. This challenge has led to a rise in organizations solely focused on connecting veterans with their communities.

22 Differences between male and female veterans will be addressed in the section of this paper labeled “Women Veteran Efforts,” and the unique challenges for veterans with families will be addressed in the section labeled “Family Reintegration”

Humility and Drive for Service. Demonstrated often in organizations focused on connecting veterans with volunteer opportunities, veterans demonstrate a strong drive to continue giving back to their communities when they return from service, and in that service, to do whatever is asked of them. One organization noted:

“I think a lot of people ... initially don't like us until they interact with us, and then they go, ‘Wow, these guys are hardworking, they are humble, they're respectful.’ ... The type of warfare that we fought for ten years required young men and women to go into villages and interact with a population of strangers—you know, culturally different, language barriers, and all those things.... There's a nuance to walking into somebody else's backyard and saying, ‘We'd like to help, and here's how we can do that.’”

Importance of Peer Support and Commitment to one Another. Multiple organizations have cited the notion that veterans respond best to services delivered by other veterans, whether clinicians, caseworkers, counselors, employment skills trainers, educators, or supervisors. Additionally, veterans experience improved mental health outcomes when connected with each other, and are more willing to seek the services of organizations recommended to them by other veterans, particularly those within their social networks. The inherent bond and trust of the brotherhood and sisterhood of those who have served is abundantly clear and has been leveraged by countless organizations in the design of service delivery models, some of which are referenced below.

Unique Reference to Successful Past. For organizations providing social services to veterans, comparing the delivery of their services to veterans versus non-veterans highlighted a unique opportunity to leverage a veteran's service for success in treatment: every veteran experienced a time in their life when he or she was a productive member of society – their military service. One staff member noted, “No matter how disorganized the vet has become, almost all of them can relate back to a time when they were part of a functioning organization. And there's an automatic pickup in the step when they get back together with other vets.” Not all those who receive social services can point to a moment when they wore a uniform and had the respect of their peers, but veterans can; this is an asset to those serving them. Veterans belong to a brotherhood and a sisterhood and can be reminded of this no matter how isolated they currently feel. This is a clear differentiation from broader society—when a veteran falls, no matter how far—he or she can be reminded that, at one point in their life, they stood tall and stood for something of which they can be proud.

Unique Responses to a Unique Population

While expecting to identify organizations which designed programming to deliver services to cohorts within the veteran community or within the post-9/11 community specifically, the research team also identified a host of characteristics unique to these cohorts and to the veteran community as a whole, as noted above. Rather than simply using lessons learned about these characteristics to segment the population into service delivery cohorts,

several organizations have leveraged the knowledge they have gained about the unique characteristics of the veterans they serve, incorporating this knowledge into the organizational or program design itself, to better deliver care and services to their veterans.

Warrior Canine Connection. As noted above, many veterans can be resistant to seeking treatment for the challenges they face. From a clinical perspective, this resistance can be heightened by post-traumatic stress and depression, which, in turn, may heighten social isolation. Consequently, veterans become not only resistant to treatment but also resistant to engage with society. Warrior Canine Connection, which trains service dogs that assist veterans with physical and mental disabilities, faced a unique situation. They started with the joint desires to assist veterans suffering from the emotional wounds of war and to train dogs for disabled veterans. Executive Director Rick Yount learned early in his career that the healing power of the human-animal bond can be transformational, both on a physical and emotional level, and he began introducing veterans suffering from severe post-traumatic stress to the dogs which needed to be trained. Yount began asking these veterans who had consistently been resistant to treatment and isolating themselves from their doctors and visitors if they would be willing to train a service dog for a fellow servicemembers in need. By leveraging veterans' drive to serve and desire for a sense of purpose and commitment to their brothers and sisters in arms (even those they would never know), the participating veteran trainers began engaging with the dogs, even those most resistant to treatment or with stubborn cases of post-traumatic stress and depression (those clinicians believed were so traumatized they had lost the ability to speak). As trainers, the veterans were required to lead the dogs through crowds and into what otherwise would have been extremely stressful situations, but the training process required them to focus on the dog and not their own challenges. In training the dog, they began healing themselves. By leveraging the powerful desire to serve each other—the bond that holds servicemembers together—and convincing the veterans to train a dog for a wounded comrade, Warrior Canine Connection was able to design their organization around a distinct veteran trait and to provide them a unique and innovative mode of treatment. In the end, nearly 70 veterans are touched by each dog throughout the training process, and at the conclusion, the dog serves for life as a service dog for a servicemembers or veteran in need.

Team Rubicon. Similar to veterans' drive to serve one another is their drive to continue to serve their communities and to regain a sense of purpose and mission that many feel they lost when they transitioned from military service. Team Rubicon conducts disaster relief missions around the country and the world, manning their missions with military veterans and civilian first responders. Since the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the organization has grown to over 16,000 volunteers. The organization's success in recruiting veterans is due in large part to this thirst for camaraderie, teamwork, mission, and sense of purpose. The strength of peer networks and a sense of renewed identity for this generation of veterans are paramount and the ability to re-join a "pseudo military" to deploy again—to do something both adventurous and in service to others—are extremely attractive. While serving alongside their peers serves as a restorative and even cathartic influence on Team Rubicon's veteran volunteers, it also serves in support of Team Rubicon's mission—without the ability to staff disaster response missions, the organization would not exist. One potential weakness of the organization through leveraging this veteran workforce and exposing volunteers to natural disasters is incidence of post-traumatic stress, so Team Rubicon provides mental health support services, and staff members—post-9/11 veterans themselves—encourage volunteers to use the resources. A culture has thus grown throughout this organization that if

your buddy is in trouble, you encourage him or her to seek help, and this peer support has helped overcome the traditional veteran resistance to seek services. By leveraging the veterans' desire to serve, join a team, regain a mission, and support one another, Team Rubicon is able to help support veterans through their transition to civilian life as well as support the lifeblood of its own organization.

Team Red, White, and Blue. Finally, as identified above, the veteran community, including the post-9/11 veteran community, is not monolithic. Each veteran transitions with his or her own perspective on service and desire to remain connected to others, or lack thereof. Each veteran transitions with a unique set of strengths and challenges and, while some experience a smooth transition into civilian employment with a stable family and financial life, others struggle significantly and experience an existential crisis, aimlessly wondering what comes next after a career of in uniform. Team Red, White and Blue (Team RWB) set out to understand these differences in veteran transition in order to map out the population they served, and conducted a broad survey of veterans with one of the nation's leading management consulting firms.

Their data analysis revealed three general populations, which they refer to as the "Family Focused," "Connection Seekers," and the "Driven." "Family Focused" veterans were described as having experienced a smooth transition—educated, employed, likely married, and likely not seeking any type of services or support. In the words of Executive Director Blayne Smith, "They're doing other stuff, which gets missed a lot when we talk about veterans and the hero-victim binary narrative. Some veterans just got in, served it, got out and they're doing just great." "Connection Seekers" tended to fit the stereotypical profile of veterans seeking services at non-profits—less educated, un- or underemployed, or experiencing heightened challenges with substance abuse or mental health. This group was likely to be junior enlisted and when asked what they sought, Smith says, "They were looking to still belong to something bigger than themselves. They didn't get out of the military and just move on just fine. They kind of miss it, right? They were looking for a mentor—they were looking for camaraderie." The third group, the "Driven," likely served as leaders in the military, and while "their lives looked good on the outside," something was missing for this group. These veterans struggled with their post-service identity and missed the opportunity to coach and lead. Team RWB found that these veterans were joining the organization in droves.

Upon recognizing these cohorts, Team RWB leaders understood that the "Family Focused" were not in much need of the organization's programming, nor was there much demand among that population. However, the needs/desires of "Connection Seekers" were complimentary to those of the "The Driven," where one group was comfortable having a leader or being mentored, and was in search of participating in a community again. Likewise, the other sought opportunities to mentor others and lead within their community. As a result, Team RWB's structure somewhat mirrors this match of skills and desires, where community leaders tend to come from "The Driven"—former officers and NCOs. While not an organizational policy, rule, or even goal, and not uniform across the organization, in some cases, the structure within RWB Chapters mirrors rank structures within the military, where veterans of higher former rank tend to take on leadership positions and mentor those of lower rank who tend to have more acute transition challenges—sometimes at the suggestion of Chapter leadership. By understanding the unique cohorts and characteristics of the veterans they serve, Team RWB has been able to model their organization to maximize impact, even without developing a differentiated program for each.

Each of these organizations, while none has established differentiated programming for a specific cohort of the veteran community, has leveraged unique and differentiated characteristics of the veteran community to their organization's—and their veterans'—benefit. This underscores the finding that while differentiation is less common at the formal, programmatic level, the expertise of individuals among those who serve veterans regarding unique characteristics within the veteran community is regularly leveraged to drive improved services and enhanced organizational performance—and this practice can be as, if not more, effective than formal differentiation.

Further Insights

Common across organizations, staff and leadership articulated the notion that it takes a special individual to work with veterans. While veterans may be resistant to seeking services, once they walk in the door, the effort to serve them has only just begun. An organization must have a culturally competent staff that can win the trust of veterans in order to be effective. Organizations in the field recommended that any staff member providing direct services to veterans either be a veteran, have experience working with at-risk populations, have lived through some hardship in life or have lived through conflict as a civilian (such as an immigrant from a country which was in conflict). A staff member at Goodwill Houston (who is an immigrant from Bosnia) stated that, "Either you have to have been through something, or you're just a very compassionate person as it relates to people, caring about their needs, because the veteran...if they see that you're just in it for a paycheck, they will know. They will know." Hire Heroes USA CEO Brian Stann, who describes his thought process on hiring as such, echoed this sentiment:

"I can't just grab a recent college grad who is really, really smart and then put them on the phone or put them next to a veteran, because you have to have some life experiences to share with them. You have to have overcome some adversity. They have to have walked a mile in those shoes to have things to share with that veteran. I want people who have been through the wringer a little bit, so that when they have a veteran who's on the phone with them or sitting in front of them saying, hey, these are some of my barriers to employment, I've got this traumatic brain injury, I've got this or that, they can share with them their own life experiences. Again, it's not just an instructor/student relationship, it's an actual personal relationship to get this veteran who may have trust issues to trust them and believe in what they're saying. When we do a workshop on a base, a lot of the veterans initially walk in and say they've been to something like this before and they're kind of doubtful. When the first class is over they're all a little surprised. They say things like 'well, wait a minute, nobody's ever talked to us like that, nobody's ever said it like that,' and all of a sudden the buy-in starts to happen."

Women Veteran Themes

As an important subtype of differentiated programming due to the rising number of women in the military and veteran population, the research team focused their attention on how the 25 participating organizations provided unique programming or support to the women veterans they serve. The team explored the organizations' unique challenges in providing services to women veterans and the strategies they employed to overcome the challenges. In addition, the team noted any differences in the ways that women veterans engaged with the organizations, their programs, and their staff members, as well as any similarities or differences in outcomes from programs compared to those focused on male veterans.

Trends and Observations in the Field

As expected, the research team confirmed research-based assertions regarding the unique challenges facing women veterans. Leaders of organizations in the field consistently echoed the same set of characteristics and difficulties relative to this subsection of the veteran population. Compared to male counterparts, women veterans are far more likely to be: primary caregivers of children; less likely to self-identify as veterans; more geographically dispersed; more likely to suffer from domestic violence; more likely to struggle with financial independence; and more likely to be victims of military sexual trauma. As stated by Irina Komarovskaya, Clinical Director of the Steven and Alexandria Cohen Military Family Clinic at the NYU Langone Medical Center, "Because of MST, [these women] have tremendous mistrust of the military and also the VA, and they would have difficulty going for services anywhere else." This notion was expressed nearly unanimously across the participating organizations. Several key challenges and practices are highlighted below.

Women-to-Women Outreach. As a result of these challenges and the resulting mistrust of veterans services, outreach to women veterans can be extremely difficult, and may require a female staff member specifically to conduct outreach efforts. Brian Murphy, also of the Cohen Center, states that "[The center will] send my wife [who also works here] to events instead of me if it's a women's event. We're obviously cognizant of that. It's like, 'Hey, some guy in a jacket is talking to me. Great.' It might not be appealing to some women, especially anyone who has ever suffered any kind of sexual assault in the military or something. That might be additional trauma. I might look like that guy [who harmed them], or just in general my appearance—or she just doesn't want to talk to another guy about this stuff." As stated by Mr. Murphy, not only do women prefer to be served by other women and it is perhaps more attractive to be approached for outreach by other women, but having a male veteran conducting outreach could actually be damaging to an organization's efforts, as it could bring up traumatic memories.

Partly due to mistrust of veterans' organizations cited above, but also partly due to their common status as caregivers, organizations also noted female veterans' resistance to seeking social services generally. Several organizations indicated that women veterans would often avoid social services until their circumstances were significantly problematic. Representatives hypothesized that due to fear of losing their children and a stigma attached to some homeless facilities (that they can be unsafe), women veterans often viewed reaching out for help as a last resort. Female veterans were cited as more likely than males to seek out other resources such as family members or friends as long as possible, or likely to develop significant rituals of survival prior to seeking services.

One staff member at Goodwill Industries of Houston described one such veteran's daily routine for herself and her children:

“She would take her children from the car to McDonald’s, they would wash up, and she would dress them for school. She knew that Kroger marked down certain things at the end of the day. She would go in with her food stamp card, she would buy these things. They would sleep in the car...She just had a system and she didn’t want to ask anybody for anything. Then when she realized, ‘These people are really here to help me,’ she’s been very, very successful. She got a \$60,000 a year job.”

Safe, Welcoming Physical Spaces. The challenge of building trust does not end once female veterans walk into an organization, however, and requires a welcoming environment and warm client interactions. Entering a waiting room full of male veterans can often leave female veterans feeling unwelcome, if not unsafe, so several organizations surveyed have adapted separate waiting areas for their female clients, if not entirely separate entrances and exits, as well as separate service areas, creating service centers within centers. While the physical locations where social services are delivered can often feel stark and unwelcoming, organizations have learned that in order to effectively serve women veterans, they must ensure that their facilities are warm and inviting, and that interactions with staff convey the same. Leading organizations have made great efforts to hire all-female staff to serve their female clients. While it is nearly impossible to prevent a woman from ever interacting with a man throughout the service delivery process, the men in each organization must be trained to recognize and be sensitive to the unique challenges these women face.

Childcare Support. Women veterans’ common status as caregivers often affects service delivery models and outcomes, as their needs tend to be different from male veterans who lack childcare responsibilities. Multiple organizations cited the need to provide childcare on-site for mothers in their programs, or for those who could not do so, the need to provide vouchers for off-site care. Additionally, these caregivers tend to have a different focus than their single male counterparts. Where the men in workforce development programs, for example, are sometimes more concerned about matching a career with their skills or their desired professional identity (and therefore are willing to wait for the right opportunity), mothers are more focused on simply getting a job to take care of their family first—then working to improve from there toward a career. Mothers taking care of children have little room to negotiate on wages if the job they are accepting is not going to provide enough money to support their family, or on the hours of the day they work if they do not have adequate child care options. Due to the difference in priorities between populations (i.e., the need to care for families), one staff member noted, “The females come in a lot more prepared. They’ll have all their documents ready for you. Some of the men, it’ll take three, four, five days to get their stuff...But [the women] have children. I mean they have families... It’s like kids are a motivation.”

Demographics and Demand. A final difficulty facing organizations serving women veterans is simply a consequence of demographics. As women veterans make up such a small subset of the population served—estimated at roughly 5-10 percent of those currently seeking services at the organizations included in this study—it can be difficult or inefficient to set aside resources and facilities specific to their care. For example, though Swords to Plowshares wishes to have greater capacity to house women, they cannot afford to set aside a certain quota of units for them if the units are going to sit unused. In response, Swords may simply identify organizations where women veterans may receive services but may not have self-identified as veterans, and train these organizations to ask, “Have you ever served in the US Military?” Many of these organizations have been surprised to find that the number of positive responses has been very high and that the impact of Swords’ training has been accordingly significant. Other organizations, such as Goodwill Houston, simply have difficulty referring women veterans to transitional housing in the community for the same reason—lack of available units. Most are only for men and, given the women’s history with MST, they will simply not be housed there. In response, Goodwill has established a special partnership with Titan Management, an agency that provides temporary housing for female veterans with children. Additionally, due to the lack of shelters for women, when a female veteran walks in, Goodwill staff automatically puts her in a hotel for the first seven days until a longer-term solution can be brokered, whereas a male veteran can be placed in a shelter. For those organizations that do house women veterans on-site in gender-integrated facilities, the use of security cameras and staff is critical in order to establish some sense of safety in the minds of the women being served.

Active Participation and Greater Potential Once Reached. On the positive side, outside of workforce development models, women were cited as generally being more up-front with the challenges they face once actually enrolled in programs. A representative from Give an Hour shared that, “Women tend to—we know this about health information in general—have different ways of reporting what’s concerning them or what’s happening, just like men and women talking to a physician.” It seems to be a general trend that, despite the difficulty in coaxing women into seeking services, resources, and care, once enrolled, these women veterans take their participation very seriously and experience strong outcomes.

Due to the rising number of women serving in the military today, the number of women veterans is correspondingly increasing. Organizations serving veterans must adapt their systems, processes, structures, and facilities, to respond accordingly to this increasing demand for services.

Women’s Services in Action

Across the 25 cases, the research team was not surprised to find that women-specific programming and women-specific facilities were rare, due in part to the inefficiencies noted above. The tension between broad acceptance and understanding of women veterans’ unique issues and challenges and the financial cost of setting aside potentially-unused facilities remains problematic as this population continues to grow. While some organizations have been able to identify funding to build out women-specific programming and facilities, others have simply had to adopt their models as best as possible to train providers, staff members, and volunteers to be culturally competent.

The Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service and Education Center. The Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service and Education Center (VMC) serves as an example of the former. The VMC understands the unique challenges women veterans face and has set out to both enroll significant numbers in its programming broadly (with 209 enrolled at the time of our site visit), as well as to develop the Mary E. Walker house, a 30-bed female transitional housing facility in Coatesville, PA. Through the VMC women’s initiative, the center has run a variety of events and programs targeting women veterans specifically. These have included a women’s book club, “Chat and Chew” sessions, a pamper day, and MST workshops. With these services in mind, the services provided through the Mary E. Walker house ultimately represent the most significant concentration of resources provided by the center pertaining to women veterans. This 30-bed facility is for women only, and for the majority of its existence represented the one of the largest of its kind in the United States. While housed in the facility, women have access to counseling and resources including training courses, open computer labs, shuttle services, and connections to a variety of related programs and services. This facility can serve as a model for organizations seeking to serve women veterans – large enough to create a community of veterans, but potentially small enough to avoid going unused and therefore causing financial inefficiency.

Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing. Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing (PHWFF) represents a less traditional and perhaps unexpected model. While one might not expect this organization to have much to do with the sensitivities related to the unique challenges facing women veterans, it serves as an example organization that understands the female veteran experience and attempts to respond accordingly. PHWFF reports that 10 percent of their participants are women. As one might expect, PHWFF does not designate specific programming for women veterans—the organization’s goal is for all of its participants to be able to come to its events and feel like they are being treated as equals. PHWFF CEO Ellen Killough stated, Project Healing Waters: PHWFF CEO Ellen Killough stated, “We have some female participants that feel for the first time in their lives they’re accepted by a group of men in their program.” Ms. Killough added that, “We are making a conscious effort to include women in our literature now. I mean, fly fishing can come across as an old-man’s sport where guys wear tweed when they go fishing.”

Some PHWFF programs have begun to host outings and events specifically for women who might otherwise not participate. As the PHWFF CEO stated, “If you just show up with a bunch of guys and a bunch of volunteers that know nothing about how to work with or understand any of the issues that they’re going through, especially being victims of military sexual trauma, they’re not going to want to participate.” PHWFF demonstrates that no matter what service an organization provides it is possible to examine ways to add cultural competency as service delivery best practice, making programming more welcoming and potentially improving outcomes for the women veterans served.

Further Insights

While all veterans must redefine a new post-service identity in some way, female veterans often must go through a process of reclaiming or redefining their femininity, as they have spent years—or potentially decades—serving in a male-dominated culture. In such a culture, displaying their femininity could have potentially placed them at risk for, at the very least, unwanted attention, and at worst, sexual harassment or assault. While nearly all female veterans must go through this process to at least some extent, those female veterans who are or have been homeless have faced such intense personal struggles that they have not had such an opportunity.

For its female veterans, Goodwill Houston established a relationship with a local makeup company and, through the Women of Worth program, provided makeovers. As a staff member noted:

“It might be not anything to me or to you, but to a person who hasn’t gotten their hair done in months—for one of the ladies, they cut her hair. They did her face. It was just phenomenal to see.”

While those serving male veterans may take into account other forms of establishing personal relationships with their clients, considerations such as these can set an organization apart in its ability to establish trust and therefore drive positive outcomes with female clients.

Finally, societal misperceptions regarding female roles in combat appear to have affected women veterans’ views of themselves and their service, which can pose a challenge to organizations serving them. While men and women have served alongside each other in combat throughout the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (despite women being allowed assignment in combat billets), society maintains the perception that women are not allowed on the “front lines.” While potentially less of a challenge for female post-9/11 veterans who have seen combat, many female veterans do not consider themselves veterans because of these perceptions, and thus will not self-identify as veterans, even when asked. However, when asked, “Have you served in the US Military?” these same women will answer positively. More research is necessary to understand what contributes to a female veteran’s perception of herself and her veteran status, but organizations in the field should understand the complexity of this perception and adjust outreach efforts accordingly. It is likely more effective to ask the question, “Have you served?” than “Are you a veteran?” when seeking to identify those who may need assistance.

Family Reintegration Themes

This section highlights findings related to family reintegration efforts. The research team investigated the range of family-specific or family-related services provided across the 25 participating organizations as well as family-centered accommodations or alterations made to existing programs and services delivered to veterans. Finally, the research team sought out unique or innovative approaches to serving veterans with family members or the families themselves.

Trends and Observations in the Field

Across the 25 organizations included in this study, nearly every organization seemed to understand the integral and interrelated nature of family issues in the successful reintegration of veterans. They predominantly acknowledged that healthy relationships at home could form the foundation for emotional and physical health, which then may lead to positive social and economic outcomes outside of the home. The majority of organizations understand both that the family’s situation affects the veteran’s issues—enabling or hindering their success—but also the inverse, that the veteran’s success or challenges (and, by extension, the services that each organization provide) affect the members of each veteran’s family.

These organizations acknowledge the stresses that service, transition, unemployment, disability, mental health problems, and incarceration can place on a family. A staff member from Give an Hour explains this phenomenon:

“Depression, anxiety, and secondary trauma gets passed on then to the kids and family. So it’s like [the servicemembers] comes back with whatever package that is. If they reintegrate successfully, everybody kind of [says], ‘Okay,’ juggles through that, gets through. If there are problems that can’t be easily resolved, that affect the relationship, it can lead to a domino effect ... We want them to get help as early as possible, but often it’s not until there’s been a divorce, or there’s been domestic violence, or there’s significant substance abuse.”

In practice, a broad swath of organizations surveyed in this study referred to their commitment to families, or their “family focused” mission. While some organizations articulating this commitment did provide family-specific programming or supports, several did not, and did not articulate any family-specific accommodations for their veterans. It seemed that their family focus was simply rhetorical or conceptual in nature; they understood that the secondary or tertiary effects of the services they provided supported positive outcomes for veterans’ families, and thus they made statements like “everything goes back to the family,” or “we are a family-driven organization.” Organizations which acknowledged the secondary, family-focused effects of the work that they performed—whether actually incorporating families into programming or not—tended to focus on issues supporting economic stability, such as workforce development, employment, or financial assistance, and noted that financial stability is a critical driver of stress (or lack thereof), and therefore family stability.

Of the organizations that *did* provide direct family support programs (either as their sole programming or in support of their primary mission), their practices centered around supporting healthy relationships within the home. Examples include clinically based PTS or relationship counseling, non-clinical (classroom-based) stress or anger management training, and good parenting techniques, which emphasize that stress transference to children leads to a host of negative outcomes across the child’s life course. While staff at these organizations acknowledged the sensitivity of calling parenting skills into question, they look for subtle ways to incorporate elements of parenting training into the broader curriculum. These organizations also tended to provide childcare services on-site or provided vouchers for off-site care, as they understood that the veterans they served would never be able to achieve family stability, healthy relationships, stable employment, or financial independence if the time commitment of attending counseling or programming prevented them from attending appointments or classes due to childcare requirements.

As a final note, several organizations offering programming to veterans, such as employment assistance, state that family members are included in their eligibility criteria, but that in practice very few, if not zero, family members were included in their population served. It was unclear as to whether this was due to lack of interest on the part of family members, but it seemed that these few organizations were largely focused on serving veterans, and only included family members in their eligibility criteria as an afterthought. In these cases, it did not seem that deliberate or extensive outreach to family members had been conducted at anywhere near the level of effort

that these organizations had dedicated toward reaching veterans. It also did not seem that these organizations viewed this lack of participation by one of their eligible populations as a failure of the organization or as a negative mark as to the organization's performance.

Families in Focus across the Landscape

Veteran and family serving organizations meet the unique needs of military families through a range of methods including designing an organization specifically for family members, including family members in eligibility criteria, establishing a mission that supports foundational elements of strong family life, and identifying and leveraging positive family effects of one's mission. Any organization could look to the organizations below to conduct a self-assessment as to its current emphasis on families and where it might like to focus in the future.

Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC). The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) is unique as an organization primarily dedicated to serving the family members of servicemembers and veterans, rather than the servicemembers themselves. Acknowledging the impact of school transitions, separation from deployed parents, stresses of reintegration of family members, trauma from parental injury and loss, and potentially transferred stress and anxiety from parents, MCEC works to shape the educational environment of military-connected children to support positive educational outcomes. MCEC educates school districts to identify and respond to the unique needs and challenges of these children, from helping them socially integrate into a new school community and understand their new school's structures and procedures to helping their parents and administrators navigate the challenges of transferring records and credits, enrolling mid-year, and understanding eligibility criteria across state lines. MCEC provides programs to build the capacity of school personnel to help students through transitions. They provide a two-day accredited interactive professional development institute called, *Supporting Military Children through School Transitions Social/Emotional Training* for community professionals caring for the military child. A one-day training for the same audience, *Helping Military Children Discover their S.P.A.R.C: Strength, Potential, Aspirations, Resourcefulness, Confidence* teaches how to assist students to develop a growth mindset, identify their personal resources, strengths and interests, and learn new strategies to help them help themselves through challenging situations. In addition, because MCEC is solely committed to the wellbeing and success of military children, they must also understand the reintegration process and how it impacts the entire family. MCEC has developed specific professional development materials for professionals working with families going through reintegration, such as *The Journey from "Welcome Home" to Now: Reunion, Reconnecting, Routine and Living in the New Normal: Helping Children Thrive through Good and Challenging Times*. Through MCEC's focus on building resilient children, this organization, in turn, supports strong families and strong veterans, as reduced stress at home can enable positive outcomes elsewhere.

Steven and Alexandria Cohen Military Family Clinic. The Steven and Alexandria Cohen Military Family Clinic at the NYU Langone Medical Center serves as an example organization providing services to family members which fills a critical gap in services that the government does not provide, as the Department of Veterans Affairs does not include families in its eligibility criteria. The Cohen Clinic welcomes a broad category of family members – spouses, non-married partners, parents, or widows of veterans, while also offering services to the constellation of individuals in a veteran's loosely defined "family."

The Clinic will see grandchildren, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even close friends, so long as the individual can articulate that the servicemembers or veteran's experiences have affected them. However, Clinical Director Irina Komarovskaya explains that a great deal of the work that the Military Family Clinic does is with couples:

“Part of what we do is educating the couple about PTS and how it plays out for the person and for the relationship. Just having the knowledge of it helps ease it. For example, the husband may be prone to anger or high intensity emotions. The wife may take it personally. But as a result of understanding more about PTS it may soften this, and then the relationship and the connection can improve. Instead of her thinking that he's against her she may see herself as on the same team. That may help improve communication and connection.”

The work at the Clinic is done in an integrative and flexible way—a couple might begin work with a clinician, and then, if, for example, the husband needed to do individual work around PTS, he might begin to see another clinician on the team on an individual basis. Other times, a veteran may come in for individual treatment and then realize that he and his spouse should do couples work. What is important, Dr. Komarovskaya says, is for the team to be in communication and to work collaboratively.

The Cohen Clinic also provides services for military children and employs a social worker at nearby Fort Hamilton Elementary School to provide outreach and services for the children there. A common issue for military children is teachers and administrators who have difficulty building connections with children who are used to moving every three years, and sometimes respond to such efforts with an attitude of “I can't talk to you, I'm going to be leaving soon.” Having a military-focused social worker on-site who understands these challenges and can work with these children enables the Cohen Center to better serve this population and then integrate the whole family into care. For example, for families who have become fractured through repeated deployments or the long-term effects from trauma, or even families of children with learning disabilities, the Cohen Clinic can help build strategies to heal the family dynamic, support the servicemembers or veteran's health, and support the child's education. Whether serving couples or parents with school-age children, through the provision of services to military families, the Cohen Clinic clearly fills a gap in services left by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and as a partner with the VA, can often work in parallel to ensure holistic care of the veteran and their family.

Operation Homefront. Operation Homefront serves as an example organization whose mission is not explicitly family focused, but rather whose work deeply affects the lives and stability of family members. As an organization focused on establishing financial stability, Operation Homefront essentially enables the establishment of healthy homes, as this team fundamentally believes that the most important needs for families—housing, education, health and wellness, and employment—are all supported by financial stability.

Operation Homefront's programs support financial stability and, in turn, familial stability and reintegration. Programming examples include providing direct financial aid through their Emergency Assistance Program; giving a family transitional housing to pay down debt, build up savings, and clean up credit; providing a mortgage-free home to serve as the foundation of a financially stable future; or even simply providing a backpack full of school supplies to slightly ease a family's back-to-school financial burden each fall. Notably, the belief in the importance of family is not isolated to the leadership team as, when asked to articulate the organizations intended impact, multiple staff members across interviews responded almost verbatim that "success is the stability of the family."

The variety of needs met by Operation Homefront's Emergency Assistance Program highlight one example of family care. EAP staff described multiple scenarios wherein veterans were eligible for VA health benefits, but could not afford health insurance for their families, and the EAP team stepped in during emergencies. In one extreme instance, a veteran's spouse needed \$10,000 in emergency dental work, which Operation Homefront covered. Another example is the Hearts of Valor group, a support group that allows caretakers of wounded, ill, or injured veterans to share their stories, experiences, and feelings with one another, providing a sort of pressure release valve to the otherwise often stressful and isolating life of a caretaker. Similarly, in their transitional housing Village, Operation Homefront hosts the BEITZ Group (Bring Everyone into the Zone) which is a peer-to-peer network led by a facilitator. This group allows veteran residents to discuss the stresses they are going through in transition—anxiety, fears, depression, and family issues. Sometimes spouses join the group to learn what the servicemembers are going through and to integrate them into the healing process. Operation Homefront demonstrates that its target population is not only the servicemembers but also the entire family unit.

Warrior Canine Connection (WCC). Finally, Warrior Canine Connection (WCC) is an example organization that has identified positive family outcomes from work that would not otherwise have been considered family-focused. While they do not espouse to be a "family-focused" organization, and they do not advertise the family-related benefits of the work they do, WCC has consistently identified anecdotal linkage to improved parenting skills and family relationships because of veterans serving as service dog trainers. Because of the training, veterans participating in the program have reported that using positive emotions to praise their dogs has significantly improved their family dynamics and interactions with their children. Executive Director Rick Yount quickly has noted the parallels to effective parenting techniques used in training the dogs: consistency, using the right commands, setting limits, exhibiting patience and providing praise.

Yount notes that some veteran trainers are initially resistant to one particular training technique (the dogs are praised in a high-pitched, "Richard Simmons-like" voice), stating that they are emotionally detached. However, as they progress with the dog training, they begin to see changes in their own behavior towards their families, especially their children. Essentially, by "faking" positive emotion with the dog to praise the dog for positive behavior, positive emotions actually begin to manifest themselves within the veterans, and these positive emotions (and positive reinforcement techniques) transfer to the veterans' interactions with their own families.

One of the earliest veteran trainers in Palo Alto was asked, “How is this helping you?” This former Marine Staff Sergeant replied:

“Sir, before I got involved with training these dogs, my wife and I were getting ready to split, and it was mostly due to the way I was treating our three-year-old son. I was honestly treating him like a stubborn private, and it wasn’t going well or anywhere. When I started working with this dog, learning how to praise the dog and the patience that I’ve been practicing in training the dog, I realized I started using that and patterning that approach with my son. To be honest, it taught me how to connect with my three-year-old on a three-year-old’s level.”

Additional anecdotal feedback echoes this sentiment, that through their dog training experience, wounded veterans have been able to reconnect with their spouses and children, thus aiding in their reintegration with family. In this way, Warrior Canine Connection has been able to identify and begin to leverage a process designed to support veterans’ health and wellbeing—and, practically, to create a service dog—to heal families.

Further Insights

While traditional views of a veteran’s downward slide into homelessness tend to focus on antecedents such as unemployment, mental health challenges, and substance abuse, few conversations centered on the series of resources that would have to fail a veteran before he or she eventually ended up on the streets. In noting that women veterans tend to wait longer than men to seek resources, numerous organizations pointed out that women tend to seek the resources of family members and friends as long as possible before admitting the necessity of social services, whereas men tend to resist doing so. One organization, Three Hots and a Cot, asserted that while *many* veterans come with addiction or mental health issues, *nearly all* homeless veterans have become estranged from family members. The organization’s assertion is that family members serve as a veteran’s last line of defense from life on the streets. In this way, reintegration with family is recognized as a crucial issue for homeless veterans, and a necessity for returning them to a healthy life. Three Hots and a Cot employs the services of a chaplain to help facilitate the reunion of families seeking services at their facility, and encourages their veterans to participate in AA and NA meetings hosted on-site to begin the healing process. While the conversation around veteran homelessness tends to include traditional focus areas such as transitional and permanent housing, workforce development, employment, and mental health and substance abuse treatment, Three Hots and a Cot’s focus on family healing and reintegration adds a valuable insight to the discussion, as the health of a veteran’s family is paramount to their long-term stability.

Employment and Education Themes

Employment and education represent primary concerns of post-9/11 veterans. Within this strategic theme, the research team investigated key practices in education and employment programming among organizations that expressly provide these services and, for those that do not, explored general attitudes toward education or

employment as they relate to veteran transition. For those organizations not designed to deliver these types of services, the research team queried the organization on the assertion that education and employment are the building blocks, if not the causal nexus, to a successful and prosperous life outside the military environment. The team also explored what the organizations do to integrate this concept into their service delivery model and what impact this has on the veterans they serve.

Trends and Observations in the Field

While the research team's intent was to explore the impact of education as well as employment, conversations with organizational leaders and staff focused almost entirely around employment programs and outcomes. Discussions of educational programs were limited to vocational training programs delivered on-site or at partner educational institutions such as community colleges. Few organizations discussed encouraging veterans or their family members to pursue higher education (such as a bachelor's or master's degree), as the organizations surveyed tended to provide services to veterans with more pressing needs, whereas veterans in more stable circumstances may be in a better position to take advantage of their education benefits.

With regard to attitudes on education and employment, however, organizations providing employment services and others providing health and wellness services broadly agree that education and employment serve as the foundation for success after service. As described below, organizations felt that employment could serve as a preventative measure against a host of negative post-service outcomes. Organizations included in this study generally fell into one of three groupings:

Those with a Strong and Primary Focus on Employment or Education. As part of the research design of this project, the research team intentionally selected several organizations that counted employment as their primary or sole mission focus. Some of these organizations focused on the most disadvantaged veterans in society—those who are homeless, struggling with substance abuse, and mental health challenges; and those who are struggling with long-term employment. Other organizations focused on transitioning servicemembers, and while willing to serve all ranks and specialties, found that their target population tended to be younger enlisted (E1-E6) servicemembers, often specifically those who served in combat branches, as they tended to have more difficulty with the transition. It should be noted that, while not included in this study, organizations do exist which—while not explicitly designed to do so—often primarily serve junior and senior officers, as well.

Likewise, no organizations were included in the study that explicitly and solely focused on veteran education. While the Military Child Education Coalition was included, this organization will be focused on in the “Reintegration with Family” and “Social Connectedness” sections, as they do not focus on the education of veterans themselves but rather that of military children.

Those Seeing Education and Employment as a Bulwark. A second category of organizations does not provide employment services but counts such organizations among their network of potential referral partners. Those who serve homeless veterans, veterans suffering from mental health challenges or substance abuse, or those who may face financial insolvency or bankruptcy understand that increased education and sustained employment prevent veterans from falling into these circumstances in the first place. These organizations often include education and employment providers in their network of referral partners to prevent recidivism and to increase the overall wellness of the veterans they serve, as they understand the centrality of education and employment to a successful transition.

Those Who are Disconnected from the Process. A third category of organizations do not view education or employment as related to what they do at all. These organizations may list a few education or employment organizations in a resource guide they provide to their veterans, staff, or volunteers, but they do not see these issues as tied to their mission and do not actively provide referrals to organizations providing these services.

Common Practices – Employment and Education

Among organizations providing education and employment services as their primary mission, the research team identified a series of leading practices that seemed uniquely suited to identify and mollify “pain points” in the process of transitioning from military service to civilian employment:

High Touch Models. The most successful organizations surveyed in this study worked tirelessly, one-on-one, with each veteran on resume writing skills and interview preparation. The research team identified a pervasive lack of self-confidence among veterans with regard to articulating their value to civilian employers, as well as a discomfort with “selling themselves,” which is associated with the culture of humility about one’s achievements bred in the military. Veterans—particularly junior enlisted—appear to require extensive coaching and mentorship to build the confidence necessary for a successful job search process, and this “life coaching” effort was described to the research team as, at times, exhausting. The best organizations are willing to put in the time to coach their veterans to success.

Provision of “Tough Love.” Both junior and senior veterans and transitioning servicemembers can have unrealistic expectations about earning potential outside of the military as well as the length of time and effort required for the job search process. The most successful organizations are brutally honest with their veterans, providing clear-eyed information about the frustrations often associated with the online job application process and the common experience of having to enter the workforce in a position of lower responsibility and less pay than one’s experience in the military. This “tough love” appeared to be respected and appreciated by the servicemembers and assisted in building trust between the servicemembers and the organizations.

Training to be Civilians, or “Civilianizing.” Following from the above, leading organizations set clear expectations for veterans and transitioning servicemembers regarding the new workplace culture they are about to enter, and the notion that leadership and communication practices common in the military will be ineffective and potentially viewed as offensive or off-putting in the civilian workplace. These organizations inform their veterans that the onus is on them to integrate themselves into the workplace, not the other way around.

Focus on Careers, not Jobs. Many organizations cited the notion that if a veteran is placed in an employment opportunity simply for the sake of earning a paycheck, but the opportunity is not a good fit for his or her skillset or interests, that veteran’s term of employment is likely to be short, and he or she is likely to end up right back at the organization’s doorstep. It is both in the organization’s and the veteran’s interest to identify a satisfying career path for the veteran rather than simply a job. Countless organizations surveyed cited this notion and strove to meet this ideal.

Establishing Networks of Employers Creating Demand. While organizations cited the strong need to train veterans to communicate their value, translate their skills, and prepare for their new civilian roles (i.e. create an adequate veteran labor supply), nearly every employment-focused organization articulated the need to create demand among employers through cultivating their own network of employer partners in which to place veteran clients. Whether serving homeless veterans—and therefore identifying employers who are willing to take on the risk of veterans with challenging backgrounds—or former senior officers, nearly every organization surveyed spent considerable effort to either fill a database of partners that their veterans could search themselves or identified partners to directly link their veterans to specific opportunities.

Seeking Opportunities in Emerging or Growth Industries. Associated with the above, while many organizations develop networks in their communities, leading organizations intentionally research growth industries to identify opportunities where there will be lasting high-demand for employees. Some of these organizations even identify specific industry partners and work with local community colleges or other educational institutions to create cohort training programs to place veterans into specific positions upon graduation. This has the added effect of achieving efficiency for the agency, enabling them to place many veterans at once rather than identifying individual training paths for each veteran, hoping to find an employment opportunity on the other end.

Providing Industry Standard Certifications. Also associated with the above, some organizations provide industry-standard certifications for veterans seeking specialized training, such as those in the information technology sector. Some of these veterans may have experience in these fields in the military, but simply lack the necessary certification to get hired by a civilian employer, so the non-profit organization fills this critical gap.

Providing Temporary Employment Opportunities. For some veterans, while living in transitional housing or while attending a job training program, they still need a paycheck to make ends meet. A few organizations surveyed provided temporary employment through contracts they possess during these “bridge” times until the veteran could locate a more permanent opportunity.

When delivering these services, organizations have learned that no two veterans are the same. Differences in rank, military role, gender, and service era all drive service delivery models, strategies for engagement with veterans, and potential outcomes for each individual. Example lessons learned from each population include:

Senior vs. Junior Servicemembers within the Post-9/11 Generation. Some organizations have identified that senior veterans—senior non-commissioned officers or senior officers—tend to have high expectations regarding the value that civilian employers will place on their military experience and that they will be able to select employment opportunities at will, whereas in reality they most often must learn to translate their skills and sell themselves just like the majority of other veterans in the market. Organizations have learned that they must temper the expectations of these leaders as they enter their job search process.

Conversely, junior enlisted members appear to have an opposite set of concerns surrounding their level of experience and education and are often concerned about their lack of a college degree. These veterans often require much coaching and encouragement when entering the job search process, such

that they learn not to fear not being accepted by a company but rather learn to view the value they bring to a company and be proud of what they have accomplished.

Combat vs. Non-combat Roles. Multiple organizations noted the heightened difficulty for servicemembers who served in combat roles versus those who served in support roles such as logistics, finance, or communications to translate their skills and market their abilities to employers. Combat veterans require more coaching in terms of identifying the soft skills they have learned and demonstrated through their service, despite the fact that they are strong and significant assets to organizations that may consider hiring them.

Men vs. Women. One organization cited the notion that many female veterans are single mothers, while single male veterans tend not have children to care for. Consequently, male veterans have more freedom to be patient and discriminating when seeking a “career,” whereas female veterans often accept a job in order to make ends meet and provide for their children, and more incrementally work their way toward a more fulfilling career over time.

Pre-9/11 vs. Post-9/11. Numerous organizations noted that the generation gap between pre-9/11 veterans and post-9/11 veterans required their organization to develop completely separate training protocols, employer networks, and wage targets for younger veterans as compared to their older, pre-9/11 clients. This is driven in part by the fact that today’s military is supported by technology to a significantly greater degree than decades ago, and younger servicemembers must be familiar with the use of such systems, making them more highly qualified for today’s economy and, thus, marketable for higher-paying jobs.

Organizations also noted that where younger clients are navigating the employment landscape for the first time and thus searching for a meaningful career to match the meaning of their military service, older veterans are likely suffering from long-term employment or layoffs due to structural shifts in the economy and thus may need retraining to simply earn a living wage which will sustain them until retirement.

Employment Services in Practice

The following are but a few interpretations of this theme that could serve as models for other organizations seeking to serve veterans and their families.

Hire Heroes USA. An example organization with a solely employment-focused model, Hire Heroes USA demonstrates a highly-personalized approach, wherein Veteran Transition Specialists (VTS) spend countless hours with individual veterans during on-base workshops or on the phone and via e-mail, coaching them on resume writing and revision, as well as interview preparation and job search techniques. Hire Heroes USA also places a strong focus on setting clear expectations for the veteran’s employment path that lies ahead. While every VTS’s approach may vary, the coaching process includes establishment of an understanding that a veteran may be entering civilian employment at a lower level and lower wage than he or she was getting in the military. Likewise, an expectation is set that the path to finding employment will likely be long and challenging—that resumes are often fed into large computerized databases and must be tailored specifically to job descriptions and that while veteran preference may be communicated at a corporate level, that may not always translate to a hiring manager level. Specific hiring processes, like those for federal jobs through the USAJobs portal, are explained to

interested veterans. Hire Heroes USA Veteran Transition Specialists also serve to boost the confidence of their veterans, however, and veterans are encouraged to recognize their value and to learn to sell themselves to hiring managers. Veterans must overcome the military's culture of humility and learn to take credit for their accomplishments during the resume writing and interview process. VTS Spencer Milo states that he needs to tell his veterans, "Stop worrying about what they may think of you or what you think they're thinking of you, and start realizing what you bring to the table and start informing them as to why you can help the organization." Regarding the role of the VTS, he states, "I would think we are more life coaches, some of us more than others, but they do need pep talks. We all do from time to time, and especially when you're coming out of a world that you've immersed yourself in." Hire Heroes USA has seen success and satisfaction from its veterans by using this model, but it acknowledges that such a high-touch process is significantly resource-intensive as each VTS can only handle so many veterans per week. While a model worthy of emulating, it is certainly not appropriate for every provider.

Veterans Employment and Training Services Group (VETS Group). A second employment-focused organization, the Veterans Employment and Training Services Group (VETS Group) takes a different, cohort-based approach. Providing coursework which prepares veterans for specific careers is VETS Group's specialty – whether information technology systems (IT), cyber-security, cell phone tower refitting (tower climbing), or pre-apprenticeship bus maintenance. Developing these programs with specific employers in mind (the bus program is run in concert with the Washington, DC metro system, and the tower climber program directly feeds veterans into multiple cell-phone providers), VETS Group trains cohorts with the intent to place their veterans almost immediately into employment slots. Looking ahead, VETS Group continually works to identify where the next gaps will be in the workforce to develop new training opportunities. As one staff member explained, "[We] try to look at the labor markets and what kind of opportunities are hot and create programs that will be producing available jobs for vets." Upon identification of these gaps, VETS Group develops training to best position their clients to fill needed slots in the nation's workforce. One example is a response to the need to modernize the nation's energy infrastructure: because of recent federal legislation encouraging energy efficiency and the move of all federal facilities to 20% off the energy grid, the VETS Group has determined that expertise in the retrofits and new energy systems necessary to accomplish this goal is a good fit for veterans seeking employment. The organization is currently engaging with experts in the field who provide training programs in photovoltaic technologies, learning about industry standards, and potentially developing a strategy to prepare veterans to work in this field. Less innovative but equally relevant regarding analysis of the local labor market, VETS Group is also considering a training program in physical security for enterprises such as the new casino in Baltimore, Maryland, and the MGM National Harbor Complex in Prince George's County, Maryland. Other employment providers could model VETS Groups procedures in identifying future market segments for its veterans and developing associated training, as this model has been successful thus far.

Operation Homefront. Operation Homefront serves as an example organization that views employment services as a preventative measure against recidivism and a host of other social problems. Operation Homefront's programs, including emergency financial assistance, transitional housing, and permanent housing, are all geared toward putting the veterans and families they serve on a solid financial footing. Operation Homefront staff recognizes that long-term financial stability rests upon employability, which often, in turn, requires further education. In support of these concerns, throughout the program of

financial counseling, staff invites representatives from local colleges to speak with residents about opportunities to leverage GI Bill benefits to advance their educational goals. Additionally, local partners visit residents to provide resume writing assistance, and a representative from the Texas Veterans Commission visits the site to link residents with employment opportunities. Other partners such as Dress for Success provide residents the resources to be successful in job interviews. While these services are corollary to the primary mission of restoring each family's immediate financial viability, Operation Homefront staff realizes that without these services, the family will never be financially independent upon departure from the program.

Further Insights

Multiple organizations expressed frustration that while countless corporations in the United States have made significant veteran hiring commitments, veterans are still struggling to find opportunities at these companies. While CEOs make strong public statements of support for veterans, it appears at times that this does not reach the level of human resources managers, where hiring actually occurs. The research team was told multiple times that they still fight the problems of overcoming stigma of PTSD and other mental health challenges, as well as the difficulty of translating skillsets – or even getting HR professionals to value military experience as on par with a bachelor's degree. When comparing a fully qualified non-veteran to a mostly-qualified but trainable veteran, it was suggested, the hiring manager will usually choose the non-veteran, independent of the company's stated hiring commitment. Organizations expressed frustration that all it would take is for these hiring managers to take a chance on their veterans and they would be surprised at the value the veteran would bring to the company. In response, several organizations are developing training programs that they hope to market to human resources departments to bridge this information and cultural gap.

As an additional insight, some organizations have identified that certain employment opportunities are a better fit for veterans than others – and that these opportunities are the ones that mirror the military's career progression systems. Where veterans are used to entering an organization with a set of basic training, then progressing through the ranks of that organization by receiving advanced training at each step, corporations which offer an onboarding and training process, along with iterative training throughout a veteran's career tend to be a good fit for veterans. Likewise, where in the military a veteran would be welcomed to a new military post by a sponsor or sponsor family, helping him or her get acquainted to the new unit, veterans perform best in organizations with veteran affinity groups with similar processes to integrate them into the company. Organizations providing employment services to veterans would be wise to identify companies that have these procedures and structures and encourage veterans to consider them as potential opportunities, as employment at these organizations would likely increase persistence and satisfaction.

Media Engagement Themes

The section highlights the use of media across the 25 participating organizations. The research team explored the organizations' communications practices and the extent to which they saw media as a means of telling their story and countering the hero-victim narrative. While investigating this theme, the team also assessed the level to which the organizations established a communications infrastructure, the robustness of their communication strategy, their outreach methods, and, most importantly, their contribution to or influence on local and national media reporting on the veteran and military population.

Trends and Observations in the Field

One component of the research team's original focus was the 25 surveyed organizations' capability and motivation to better inform and transform the media's hero-victim narrative. This line of inquiry evolved, however, to include discussion on their learning process with respect to communications and media-relations strategies and methods that would enhance their programmatic impact.

Limited Media Ties. In terms of relationships with traditional media outlets, few organizations had direct ties or contacts, or possessed the ability to shape a media narrative, as the research team initially set out to understand. While a few organizations had established relationships with local cable or news outlets to feature a weekly or monthly feature on a veteran they served or a veteran in the community, this was extremely rare. As a research finding, therefore, the ability to counter the media hero-victim narrative on the part of veteran-serving non-profits was largely nonexistent across the 25 participating organizations. Rather, organizational efforts to do so are primarily driven by communications with donors, the communities the organizations operate in, and other various stakeholder groups through the organization's disparate communications strategies.

A Wide Range of Capability. Through conversations with leaders in the field, researchers learned that a broad array of communications sophistication exists among organizations serving veterans and their families. While nearly every organization possessed a social media presence of some kind—if not solely out of the sense that “we should”—and at least an e-mail or print newsletter for donors, the presence of other communications methods varied extensively. The research team found that, perhaps predictably, media and communications sophistication are generally (though not exclusively) correlated to the financial strength of an organization along with, at times, its national prominence (as opposed to its community-based nature). The most sophisticated organizations appear to have a robust communications and media relations strategy, including some or all of the following: a staff member specifically dedicated to media relations, communications, social media, or outreach; differentiation of messaging to various stakeholder audiences, such as donors, partners, and the veterans the organization serves; and differentiation of messaging content and style through the various media types—e.g., print, television, web, social media, direct mail, and e-mail.

Media Strategies. The most sophisticated organizations surveyed leverage two separate media strategies (social media, e-mail, op-eds, national news) for both strategic (national) and tactical (local) purposes. The strategic approaches are aimed at positioning their organization as a visionary or thought leader, using communications for stewardship and fundraising, or leveraging their platforms to develop partnerships. Alternatively, the tactical strategy (using print and local media, for example) is typically used for outreach to veterans and advertising for enrollment in specific programming. Additionally, in the effort to position themselves as leaders in the field, more sophisticated organizations sometimes disseminate emerging research and news stories associated with their practice (veterans homelessness, health and wellness, or employment, for example), along with the more common distributions of organizational announcements, newsletters, and event information. Further seeking to position themselves as thought leaders, CEOs and presidents of some nationally-prominent organizations have authored opinion pieces in outlets such as the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, or Huffington Post, while some community-based organizations have columns in local papers—each advocating for support for veterans issues, if not for their organizations specifically.

Website Presence. Varying levels of sophistication exist with regard to web presence—in design, use, and management. While some organizations use their websites for informational purposes only (to describe programming, eligibility criteria, list key leaders and board members, etc.), others have the functionality necessary to enroll participants through their website, as well as accept donations, and field web-based queries. Following from the discussion above regarding thought leadership, some organizations host blogs on their websites which discuss veterans issues broadly, or which feature testimonials from the veterans they serve. Several organizations discussed the use of analytics to track volume, origins, and patterns of web traffic, though, again, this generally correlated with level of funding and reach of the organizations as a proxy for level of communications sophistication.

Communications as a Point of Tension. In addition to the strategies referenced above, a few common challenges emerged among the set of organizations reviewed. Consistent with the association between funding and communications sophistication, countless organizations expressed frustration at the tension between allocating resources between administrative costs (which they viewed as including communications infrastructure) and programmatic costs. While many grants establish restrictions regarding administrative cost ratios, numerous organizations expressed the belief that the ability to invest in greater communications infrastructure would bolster their fundraising ability, as they would have greater capacity to articulate the good work they were doing and the success stories of their veterans. In fact, as a response to resource constraints early in their organization’s development, Team Rubicon described their deliberate choice to invest in a communications team prior to hiring a development team, and has focused significant attention on articulating their story. This decision has generated a significant enough return on their investment that they have only recently—four years later—hired a development team.

Standing out from the Crowd. A second frustration arose out of the sheer prevalence of actors in the veterans’ services landscape. Organizations expressed a constant need to build brand awareness and to ‘rise above the noise’ of the countless thousands of other non-profit organizations seeking to provide services to the same population of veterans. With scores of employment organizations sharing similar names—including the words ‘Hero’ and ‘Hired’, for example—it can be incredibly difficult for organizations to set themselves apart as those who provide expert advice and high-quality services. Without a robust communications infrastructure and significant resources to dedicate to a media and communications effort, great organizations appear almost indistinguishable to veterans from those that provide low-quality services. These same organizations fear changing their names to set them apart because they do have years of brand recognition with their stakeholders which they fear they would lose. This challenge is damaging to both veterans and those wishing to serve them.

Creative Communications

Several organizations surveyed identified ways to leverage otherwise-popular mediums to gain attention for their cause. They found non-veteran-specific outlets for their message to expand awareness. Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing has been featured in fly-fishing publications that would otherwise not cover veterans’ issues, raising awareness among an otherwise potentially oblivious population of anglers. Hire Heroes USA leverages its CEO’s connection to wrestling (he is a former UFC fighter) and veterans’ proclivity for enjoying such entertainment as an outreach strategy to attract veterans to their services but also raise funder and public awareness among the

WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment) and UFC watching communities. Operation Homefront conducts its home giveaways with country music star Tim McGraw during his concerts, which raises awareness of veterans' issues and their mission during concerts, and sometimes leads to increased donations.

Warrior Canine Connection. Warrior Canine Connection serves as a leading example of this principle. With a grant from the Annenberg Foundation WCC set up, a 'puppy cam' to monitor new litters of puppies 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A link to the puppy cam was posted on the explore.org website. According to Jamie Williams, WCC's public relations officer, the social media presence "exploded" with the puppy cam, which had 2.5 million hits on Facebook. A subset of viewers calling themselves Extreme Puppy Watchers (EPW) set up their own Facebook page. This group includes over 2,000 members. Williams credits the puppy cam with creating a broad civilian following, educating the public about the WCC mission, and providing an "aha" moment among viewers, helping to bridge the civilian-military divide. Williams believes the organization has "hit a really magic spot in social media where we've been able to coalesce a huge and dedicated community around us." The majority of WCC's financial support comes from individual donations, primarily through the organization's website and Facebook page, with the "Extreme Puppy Watchers" cited as being the most generous donors and fundraisers, and the force behind multiple web-based fundraising efforts through CrowdRise, a for profit e-commerce website that uses crowdsourcing to raise charitable donations. CFO Vicki Robinson noted that WCC has won two out of three CrowdRise challenges, netting the organization \$300,000. This demonstrates not only the power of effective use of social media, but also the power of identifying creative ways to use media to draw an otherwise non-veteran-connected audience into a veteran-focused mission.

Further Insights

While likely applicable to many organizations, Hire Heroes USA described a different type of communications challenge—the tension of finding the "right amount" of outreach to expand awareness among funders but not overwhelm themselves with demand among veterans. While this may seem counterintuitive, this organization seeks to provide a high-touch model and can only handle a certain number of veterans per week without, they feel, degrading the quality of services they provide. In order to expand the number of veterans they could provide these services to, they would need to increase outreach to attract new donors. However, this outreach could also increase demand to a point they could not handle. COO Nate Smith describes: "We have avoided marketing campaigns because we don't want a slew of veterans coming to us that we can't help. But at the same time, there needs to be awareness out there so people identify that you're an organization they want to fund."

Life-Course Transition Themes

Post 9/11 veterans are not as prepared for civilian life as they could be, and for some, at great consequence—unemployment, homelessness, poor health, or worse. To assess this theme, the research team examined how each of the 25 participating organizations prepared veterans and their family members for a successful transition as a complement to government programming.

Trends and Observations in the Field

Organizational leaders and staff indicated adamantly and consistently that the transition to civilian life should occur *before* servicemembers leave the military. Yet, a great majority of organizations expressed an inability to reach, much less impact, servicemembers at or before the point of transition due to a lack of access. Many organizations stated their belief that the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) alone is insufficient. Consequently, some have established relationships with TAP managers on local bases to inform them and, where possible, active servicemembers of their services. Several organizations are still seeking access. While many organizations in the study were unable to serve veterans prior to separation, the organizations were still able to provide considerable insight into the components necessary to prepare servicemembers for a successful transition.

Quality Educational Counseling. Unfortunately, many organizations have encountered veterans who lack necessary educational credentials for the employment they seek, have pursued majors that leave them ill prepared for gainful employment, or have spent considerable sums of money at institutions lacking accreditation or legitimacy in the labor market. Guidance on choosing to pursue higher education in preparation for the job search process, as opposed to immediately seeking employment; deciding what course of study to pursue and what institution to select; and how to finance one's education (depending on GI Bill eligibility) would be critically beneficial. The lengthy interview discussion supported the notion that transitioning veterans suffer from a lack of adequate information to make sound decisions at such a critical turning point in their lives.

Geographically Specific Career Counseling. Organizations also noted the need for employment counseling that supports placement in sustainable, satisfying careers rather than transitory, low wage-paying jobs, since high turnover in unsatisfying positions fails to provide long-term stability that veterans need. Such counseling could involve vocational aptitude and interest assessments as well as mentorship opportunities with professionals in potential fields of interest. It was also suggested that career counseling include labor market analysis to coach veterans on economic possibilities in their geographic areas of interest so they leave the military with realistic expectations on opportunities, risks, and potential difficulty of finding work given their experience and education. Too often, veterans fall into the trap of making post-service choices based solely on geography. Homelessness providers in the study noted a consistent flow of veterans arriving in their cities with the general impression that there were jobs (based on hearsay from their peers), only to find significant barriers to entry in the local labor market. After months of job searching and depleting their resources, these veterans found themselves on the streets and seeking services from homelessness providers.

Financial Literacy and Benefits Training. Further, organizations recommended that veterans be provided with financial assessments, counseling, and training prior to transition. Such resources would inform veterans of the differences in financial obligations of service and post-service life, assess servicemembers' current financial position, and provide them with training as to how to manage their finances so as to enable financial stability post-transition. Provided early enough prior to separation from the military, such training would enable veterans the opportunity to adjust spending habits and place themselves on a more stable financial footing in advance of their transition. Organizations consistently noted that veterans are surprised by the slew of additional costs associated with civilian life and the financial consequences of failing to plan for these costs. Cost of living is another critical issue lacking full appreciation. The military adjusts pay and allowances based on cost of living.

Organizations noted that transitioning veterans were often surprised by the financial impact of making geographic decisions without accounting for cost of living. Of note, one non-profit included in this study—Operation Homefront—provides these services and is highlighted further below.

To enable all of the above, organizations emphasized the need for servicemembers to receive *extensive* pre-transition counseling regarding their awareness of and assistance in applying for federal benefits. Whether understanding their eligibility for health care at the Department of Veterans Affairs, applying for disability compensation, or taking advantage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill (among many other benefits), ensuring that transitioning servicemembers have a thorough understanding of the robust system of support provided by the federal government was deemed critical by organizations in the effort to enable their post-service stability and success.

Resetting General Expectations. These findings suggest that as a group, veterans tend to hold a widespread set of unrealistic or uninformed expectations about life after service. Multiple organizations cited the challenges that their veterans faced and described the notion that not only did these former servicemembers feel that they were more valued within the military—because they were getting paid considerably more—but that in the civilian world they had lost access to heavily-relied upon resources like the commissary, the gym, on-post housing. Through her own transition experience, one veteran staff member described the drastic contrast of having everything provided by the military to having to survive outside of such a robust support system:

“I was like, ‘God, I need my commissary.’ I went to the gym for free. I didn’t pay a gym membership. I mean, we went to the movies for free, the soccer was on base, the Girl Scouts, the Boy Scouts, and the school was on base. So my kids have never ridden public transportation.”

For many veterans, particularly career servicemembers, accepting a civilian job will mean a decrease in income compared to what they received in the military. This requires additional career counseling until the servicemembers is ready to lower their expectations in regards to income. There is also a need for career counseling to learn job application skills (e.g., preparing a resume, learning interviewing skills, having an appropriate wardrobe). One staff member noted:

“The people that we see are ill-prepared. They just weren’t [ready]. I talk to guys every day all day that say, ‘I just didn’t know it was going to be this hard. They said, ‘Just go, get out there, and you’ll find a job. There are plenty of intervention programs out there. There are plenty of folks out there to help you. Go get your job.’” And it’s not. It’s a culture shock. They get frustrated really easy. If it’s not there in a week, they’re frustrated.”

Organizations noted that this set of assumptions that their clients have when leaving the military—that certain things will be provided to them, that they will get higher wages because they served, or that finding employment will be easy—also carries over to making assumptions about the trustworthiness of those they associate with. These consequences can also be financially damaging. One staff member described the culture of trusting one’s command when they ask a servicemembers to sign a document and how that trust can fail a veteran later in life:

“When you’re getting ready to deploy, you’re filling out how many sheets of paper? So those guys are signing. A lot of the company commanders are saying, ‘Hey, hurry up and sign this. Sign the care plan.’ They just put whatever because they don’t really [think about it] — every time you go to medical or something you’re just accustomed to signing documents and just sending it back. You can trust that in the military because you have that SI or somebody that’s going to take care of the paperwork. So you know that it’s going to be taken care of. But in the civilian sector I tell these guys, ‘Guys, you’ve got to read. You can’t just assume that these folks have got your best interests at heart. You’ve got to take responsibility and take ownership.’”

Supporting Identity (Re)Formation. This notion of being blindsided by civilian culture can leave many veterans feeling culturally and socially isolated. Numerous organizations described the challenge of veterans having to redefine their identity in the civilian world, removed from the norms, ideals, rituals, and values that they once held so dear, as well as the team they once felt so strongly a part of—the military as a whole. Dr. Irina Komarovskaya of the Steven and Alexandria Cohen Military Family Clinic explains:

“I think a big [transition] is kind of the social transition, because in the military people are very, very closely knit together, and you have a really strong support system. You have your buddies, and you know people are going to be there for you no matter what. I think when a lot of vets come out, we hear a lot that they feel very alone and sort of isolated in the way we interact together [as civilians]; there’s a lot more personal distance. I think that is a big one that comes up for them—it’s a different culture. And it can never be replaced really. A lot of times, time after time it’s just this longing for that connection, but it really can never be replaced.”

This notion is echoed by organizations like Team Rubicon and Team Red, White, and Blue, both of which serve as proxies for the team- and values-based cultures that veterans had to leave behind when departing military service. This problem with identity and social disconnection cannot be eliminated, but could potentially be mitigated by coaching veterans to be aware that it is coming and ensuring that as they make choices about where to move after service, they choose a location where they will have both strong social support and a positive economic outlook.

TAP: Opportunity to Engage Earlier. Finally, organizations articulated concerns that the transition process begins too close to a servicemembers' actual separation date from the military. By the time the process occurs, servicemembers are so eager to leave that they pay little to no attention in TAP classes and fail to make adequate preparation. Organizations noted that, while the amount of time varies for each individual veteran, for those who end up seeking the assistance of social services, (anecdotally) this process takes roughly 3-5 years to unfold. Those who reach out to these organizations often do so at a time of great need (homelessness, danger of homelessness), rather than doing so when problems begin.

On-Base Access: A Key to Impact

As noted above and through no fault of theirs, the vast majority of VSNPs across the country are poorly positioned to serve this population as they make the transition to civilian life. The participants in this study widely agree that preparation is one of the most critical elements of a successful transition—and it should occur months before they leave the service, not the day after. One organization included in this study accesses active duty personnel during their lengthy medical retirement process and, therefore, has significant influence on these servicemembers prior to their transition to civilian life.

Operation Homefront. In some ways, the transition from military to civilian life is the foundation of the need for much of Operation Homefront's programming, as staff and leadership believe that the seeds of financial instability often originate during military service and are exacerbated during, or even because of, the transition. Emergency Assistance Program staff described an environment in which financially illiterate servicemembers who are often poorly prepared for the transition, are surprised by lower civilian wages and unexpected additional costs, rapidly finding themselves in financial trouble as newly-transitioned veterans. In some cases, financial choices made during military service leave transitioning servicemembers in serious financial trouble prior to separation, and those who suffer from disabilities which prevent employment may soon face homelessness. In these instances, Operation Homefront steps in as the bridge to reduce the impact of (or even turn around) what could have been a tragic transition through its transitional housing program. Along with rent-free housing offered to servicemembers in financial need who are awaiting medical separation or the initiation of VA benefits payments, this program of mandatory financial counseling, budgeting, and saving reverses transitioning families' financial freefall, allowing these families to pay down debt, build up savings, and repair credit. To facilitate a holistic transition out of DoD and into the VA, Operation Homefront staff partner with VA case managers to ensure proper enrollment in benefits programs and medical systems. Additionally, Homefront staff review eligibility for other benefits for which the family may be eligible and assist the family with the application process to provide additional financial support, ensuring a smooth transition into the system of social supports that exists to prevent further financial

hardship. As residents of the transitional housing program move to a more permanent housing situation and transition to civilian life, they often have secured a stable financial future due to the opportunity to live free of the burden of rent, coupled with the financial training and management package mandated by the program.

Additional Insights

Hire Heroes USA CEO Brian Stann articulated the notion that an effective transition, particularly into stable employment, can fulfill a veteran's need for a sense of mission and make him or her feel like a contributing member of society, move on with life, and support a host of other health and wellness outcomes. His comments are worth inclusion here:

“When the transition fails, that’s when veterans go off to dark places. When they go back home or they’re out there alone, they’re no longer in that recovery unit. Their brothers and sisters are gone, they’re on their own, they can’t pay their bills, they don’t have any responsibility anymore, their self-esteem goes down, and now we’ve got 22 veterans a day taking their own lives. I mean, it’s unbelievable. And then you’ve got substance abuse, alcoholism, and all these self-medicating ways to deal with the problems. A lot of those things go away when that transition is effective and you go from, ‘Hey, here’s my mission now’ to ‘Wow, I’ve got this whole new mountain to climb. I’ve got this new job,’—we all get excited for new opportunities. You get re-motivated, reinvigorated, and when you can create that for them and effectively have the transition, these other things go away. Their injuries no longer define them. Their combat deployments no longer define them.

We run into a lot of veterans now who haven’t deployed in eight years but it’s still all they talk about. It’s what defines them. They haven’t found anything else yet that they can grab onto. And there’s nothing wrong with being proud of your service, that’s great, but if the only thing that’s going to define you is that you were a combat veteran, sometimes that can lead to a very narrow life in anger, that chip on your shoulder, and that effective transition can get rid of all of that and gain the perspective you need to live a great life. I mean, what we’re ultimately trying to do is see these men and women through so they can live the American dream that they fought for.”

IV. FINDINGS & CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

This report highlights findings from an in-depth study of leading service-delivery practices represented across a sample of veteran-serving, not-for-profit organizations operating in the United States. The study's guiding premise is that the most impactful veteran-serving organizations are those that are 'effective' – defined as enacting processes and structures positioned to reliably and consistently achieve the outcomes the organization intends to produce (outcome accountability),²³ and at the same time execute on opportunities to adapt and customize organizational processes, practices, culture, and models of service-delivery in ways that incorporate process and practice themes demonstrated to correlate with advancing social, economic, and wellness concerns of veterans and their families. Accordingly, our purpose is to highlight processes and practices uniquely relevant to serving veterans and their families, in a way that informs veterans and military family as consumers, and that drives more effective and impactful VSNP service delivery and philanthropic giving.

The research team believed at the outset of this project that while the foundational organizational effectiveness themes were essential to outstanding service delivery to any population, the remaining nine themes would emerge as the enablers of excellence in service to veterans and military families. Admittedly, several veteran-focused themes explored throughout are either intuitively important to providing impactful services or considered conventional wisdom. For these reasons, it was not our intent to test their magnitude or relative importance. Rather, our aim was investigate when, where, and how the themes applied in practice, with the intent of better informing other veteran-serving organizations, their funders, and above all, their veteran consumers on what 'right' looks like in this space.

In practice, the research team found that the hypothesis was broadly true; that is, structures and processes advancing organizational effectiveness are necessary for delivering excellence in veteran-serving organizations, but are not sufficient to do so – organizations must also act to impact the unique concerns of veterans and military families and enact this knowledge through adaptations in their service delivery models. Additionally, it appears that among the veteran-specific themes, the first four referenced below – community connectedness, social connectedness, independent sector involvement, and veteran programming differentiation – are more broadly applicable and perhaps more critical for organizations to focus on than the remaining five. Two of the remaining themes – women veteran efforts and family transition – came to be viewed by the research team as sub-categories of veteran programming differentiation. In other words, organizations that demonstrate adept capability at responding to unique needs of specific veterans or cohorts within the veteran communities are also often experts at identifying the unique needs of women veterans and their families.

The research team also came to view media and education and employment as related to, though not unified with, the theme of social connectedness, as each of these themes contained an element of bridging the civilian-military divide. As noted below, these themes, while important for all organizations to consider, also came to be viewed as most applicable to certain segments of the service population. Finally, the theme of life-course transition was found to be perhaps most difficult for organizations to operationalize as very few surveyed had access to servicemembers prior to the point of transition.

23 Scott, W.R. (1992). *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems* (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Additionally, the processes and structures supporting outcome accountability (effectiveness) were generally found to be generally lacking across this landscape – a finding not wholly unexpected but surprising in its breadth. This finding was driven by the revelation that investment in organizational infrastructure and data and measurement capability is often restricted by resource constraints, which are impacted (if not primarily caused by) restrictive programmatic-to-operational cost ratios. Further, organizations were broadly found to measure only what was asked of them by their funders (while outliers demonstrated particularly innovative models). These findings highlight a significant role for the funder community to drive innovation and growth in the community of providers, both by funding investment in organizational capacity and infrastructure, and by holding funded organizations accountable for more robust measurement and evaluation practices.

Key findings and recommendations, organized by theme, are summarized below.

General Findings:

- *There is a great deal of nuance associated with delivering effective and impactful services to veterans. The most impactful organizations are those that evolve and adapt (i.e. learn) to purposefully tailor and customize service delivery in ways that accommodate the inherent differences between veterans.*
- *Rarely are two veteran-serving organizations created equal; there is an incredible degree of organizational diversity across the community of veteran-serving organizations, in focus, models, and methods.*

Themes Impacting Organizational Effectiveness:

- *Funders drive organizational behavior and change, such that the more sophisticated the funder(s), the more sophisticated the organization.*
 - *For example, the research highlights that an organizational focus on data collection and performance evaluation – to the extent such a focus existed – was predominantly driven by (and rarely exceed) funder mandates.*
 - *Only the most advanced organizations implemented their own data collection and analysis systems in support of broad-based organizational assessment.*
 - *This association was apparent across the 25 cases, and represents an opportunity for the funder community to drive innovation toward greater/more efficient impact and serving a demographically evolving veteran population with changing needs.*
- *The community of veteran-serving non-profits remains largely immature (with regard to processes, practices, and efficiencies). This was particularly true in the context of presumed maturity differences between young/new versus older, pre-9/11 organizations – differences which were largely unfounded by the research team.*
- *Many veteran-serving organizations exhibit a strong pull toward the status quo, such that they are reluctant to move beyond legacy models of process and service-delivery, so as to best accommodate the changing needs of the veteran population they serve.*
- *The lack of availability of non-program directed funding, and the push for high program-to-administration expense ratios, often lead to decreased investment in the organizational infrastructure necessary to support continuous innovation and organizational improvement.*
 - *This funding shortcoming correlates with organizational shortcomings in areas such as measurement and evaluation, continuous innovation, communications, and awareness-building.*

Community Connectedness Themes:

The most effective veteran-serving organizations enact and leverage partnerships and service-delivery collaborations with complementary providers.

While partnering relationships are arguably important across the non-profit landscape, such relationships are particularly critical for veteran-serving organizations – specifically because veterans in need of services and supports typically demonstrate multiple areas of needs. However, this principle appears applicable on a sliding scale; that is, for those organizations serving veterans in the direst of circumstances, a robust referral network is strongly related to impactful service delivery. For those serving veterans in less critical circumstances (those simply needing assistance with job coaching, for example), the ability to enact and leverage organizational partnerships is less critical. Further, for community-based providers, programming is enhanced as a function of collaboration with other, community-connected providers.

Key Recommendations:

- *Providers should be known by and know other providers in their community. Being connected is beneficial for all, regardless of the type of service, if not at least for the ability to help veterans address other needs.*
- *The closer a provider is to providing direct, “high-touch,” street-level services to veterans, the more closely it should be connected to, and frequently interact with, other community based service providers.*
- *Participation in robust, integrated referral networks or communities of practice is essential for achieving high impact in a given community, particularly those providing emergency services or serving vulnerable populations.*

Social Connectedness Themes

The most effective veteran-serving organizations recognize that robust and community-connected relationships are key to post-transition wellbeing, and therefore act to cultivate such relationships for the veterans they serve.

The experience of social isolation among veterans is insidious, and has far-reaching implications. While some organizations are explicitly designed to bridge the civilian-military divide, many of the most impactful purposefully incorporate mechanisms to advance social and community connections for (and between) veterans and non-veterans, as a byproduct of their service-delivery models. For example, the most impactful employment-focused organizations are those that realize that bridging this divide is a key component of their success – helping employers understand the value of veterans, and helping veterans understand how to fit into the workplace.

Key Recommendations:

- *Veteran-serving organizations should recognize that assisting veterans to understand and learn to accept their new civilian environment is as integral, if not more so, than bolstering their intangible and unique qualifications.*
- *Veteran-serving organizations that provide employment services should continue to advocate staunchly on behalf of the veteran to employers, lauding their special work ethic, integrity, and team spirit.*
- *Veteran-serving organizations that provide employment services must reiterate to their veteran clients that it is on them to reach out to civilians and redefine their own identity in civilian society.*
- *Veteran-serving organizations should ensure that veterans understand that the battle to socialize and bridge the civilian-military divide is a long and enduring process, one that requires patience, work, and a positive outlook.*

Independent Sector Engagement Themes:

The most effective veteran-serving organizations view funder partnerships as symbiotic and collaborative, and leverage (beyond simply funding) the knowledge and expertise of funding partners to improve their own internal processes and systems.

Organizations serving veterans should look to the independent sector for more than just funding. While financial support is critical, private sector and philanthropic partners can help non-profits obtain supplies and volunteers, but most importantly, help them innovate through the provision of pro-bono services, consulting, and service on boards, helping them design cutting edge business models, data and measurement systems, and communications platforms, to say the least. These types of strategic collaborations can empower non-profits to higher levels of performance and overcome resource and human capital constraints.

Key Recommendations:

- *Veteran-serving organizations should view these partnerships as symbiotic and collaborative, leveraging unique knowledge of industry experts to improve their own internal processes and systems.*
- *When possible, veteran-serving organizations should seek out strategic partners who can provide pro bono support.*
- *Veteran-serving organizations should proactively diversify their donor portfolios by adding new strategic partners both within and across the private and independent sectors.*

Veteran Programming Differentiation Themes

The most effective veteran-serving organizations acknowledge and embrace the inherent differences between veterans, and incorporate those differences into the organization's process, practice, and service-delivery.

Veterans must be treated as individuals, with unique goals, aspirations, challenges, opportunities, and barriers. Designing programs with an "all veterans are the same" mindset not only leads to poor outcomes, but also represents a barrier to program accessibility. Excellence is driven through individual case management, individually designed programming, or individually tailored care. The best veteran-serving organizations respect the broad diversity within the veteran population, and take efforts to tailor their programming as best as possible in response to this diversity.

Key Recommendations:

- *Veteran-serving organizations should implement and execute a robust, thorough, and holistic case management system for every veteran or family member to understand their history and provide a tailored engagement strategy for that client.*
- *Veteran-serving organizations seeking to conduct excellent veteran program differentiation should create and maintain tailor-made training or programming based on the veteran's particular circumstances and needs.*
- *Staff in veteran-serving organizations should demonstrate their undivided and individualized commitment to a veteran and his or her family in order to develop and sustain trust, which is crucial prior to conducting training or providing a service to a sensitive cohort within the veteran population.*
- *Organizations that have demonstrated success in differentiation appear to also be successful in fundraising; thus, investing time and resources in program differentiation may yield positive returns.*

Women Veteran Themes

The most effective veteran-serving organizations embrace differentiated service-delivery in support of the unique concerns of women veterans.

Most are aware of the unique and challenging aspects of military service as a woman – including, but not limited to, military sexual trauma, societal misperceptions about service, family care needs, and challenges regarding identity after service. Those serving women veterans in the direst of circumstances need to be the most aware of these challenges and adapt their services as such. All providers, however, should welcome women veterans into their services at every step, from marketing materials, to creating a welcoming environment and ensuring positive outcomes.

Key Recommendations:

- *Veteran-serving organizations that do not differentiate their programming for women must still recognize that women veterans face unique challenges that may require a referral to another service organization and be cognizant of that fact when providing their services.*
- *Veteran-serving organizations that provide services and programming to women should be sensitive to certain problems and aware of the hesitancy with which women veterans will seek out their services.*
- *Veteran-serving organizations that are currently still operating on an antiquated model of service, linked to a male-dominated military (e.g., non-gender specific transitional housing bays), should seek to expand their service capacity to serve women veterans.*

Family Reintegration Themes

The most effective veteran-serving organizations acknowledge and incorporate a focus on family, in the context of process, practice, and service-delivery.

A veteran and his or her family must be treated as one unit – they served together as one, and they transition together as one. The presence of family members during military service and post-transition both complicates the experience – providing additional responsibilities and burdens on the veteran – and enhances the experience – supporting resiliency and providing emotional comfort. Successful organizations learn to support the challenges that veterans' families bring to the transition process, as well as leverage the strengths that they provide throughout.

Key Recommendations:

- *Veteran-serving organizations must first understand that a veteran with a family has a unique set of concerns and possibly challenges because the family is an inseparable extension of him or herself.*
- *Veteran-serving organizations, with the capacity to do so, should seek to expand their services and programming to integrate a veteran's family.*
- *In the event a provider cannot offer particular services and programming to the veteran's family, they should seek to find assistance for the family members through use of an extensive referral network.*

Employment & Education Themes:

The most effective veteran-serving organizations understand that education and employment are the foundation of a successful transition, and act to advance educational and vocational opportunity for the veterans they serve (directly, or indirectly through partnership).

Giving veterans a clear sense of the hurdles they face and what they need to accomplish to achieve success – is vital, and organizations providing employment and education services must help veterans help themselves integrate into the workforce as model employees through individualized, high-touch training to give them the confidence they need to succeed. All providers serving veterans must understand that employment and education are the bedrock of post-transition success – and supporting these two efforts prevents a host of other negative outcomes, as well as prevents the backslide for those who have already overcome challenges from their past.

Key Recommendations:

- *All providers need to understand that employment and education are critical nodes in a veteran’s successful post-service transition. Organizations that do not provide employment or education services must still understand that these services may prevent other potentially irreparable issues from emerging and bulwark against recidivism.*
- *For employment models, “high touch,” one-on-one counseling that is honest (e.g., provides “tough love”), sets realistic expectations, and focuses on careers as opposed to jobs are ideal. Differentiated advice is also critical.*
- *All providers should consider integrating education and service providers into their referral network, especially those with a financial, housing, health, or wellness mission.*

Media Engagement Themes

The most effective veteran-serving organizations understand that the media represents an opportunity to inform that narrative that is both the veteran and the veteran-serving organization, and act on that opportunity to cultivate a positive narrative in service to both parties.

While media stories surrounding veterans traditionally follow a misleading hero/victim narrative, most non-profit organizations serving veterans lack the resources to meaningfully engage with the media – to tell their stories at all, let alone to influence this narrative broadly. We found that large, nationally-prominent non-profit organizations did tend to have a broader communications capacity, however, and thus a responsibility to attempt to shape this misleading narrative. Doing so improves outcomes not only for the veterans and families they serve, but also for the entire veteran and military family community.

Key Recommendations:

- *Veteran-serving organizations should leverage media via communication platforms to the extent that they have the capacity to do, to include, at a minimum, ability to brand themselves and share success stories on social media (e.g., Facebook).*
- *More financially secure non-profits should look to expand their brand and message via media by identifying staff to lead communication efforts for the organization.*
- *Veteran-serving organizations, when utilizing the media, should be cognizant of possible biases of the media outlets they may use and should focus their efforts on finding platforms that honestly and accurately portray the veteran and their services to the surrounding community.*

Life-Course Transition Themes

The most effective veteran-serving organizations recognize that transition from military service spans multiple social, economic, and wellness concerns, and as such adopt a whole-of-the-person approach to service-delivery.

Incredibly few organizations profiled were engaged with clients prior to their transition from military service – but almost all indicated the critical need for such engagement. The reality of this space is that most veteran-serving organizations serve the purpose of addressing a ‘failed’ transition – the fallout once poorly-prepared and ill-informed veterans and their families fall on hardship when facing the realities of post-service life. A major lesson learned through this process was that the wealth of knowledge acquired by the organizations surveyed through years or decades of “picking up the pieces” could be leveraged by the federal government toward designing a better transition process, but no process currently exists to do so.

Key Recommendations:

- *Veteran-serving organizations near military installation or hospitals should seek out opportunities to build stronger relationships and to provide training and services on or in conjunction with the installation to ease veteran transition.*
- *Veteran-serving organizations should collect data and information during intake on any perceived weaknesses in federal transition programming to focus and tailor their programming or services as required.*
- *Policymakers should establish a more robust process for harnessing veteran-serving organization data and knowledge as a means of informing and improving TAP.*

As we expected, this study confirmed a great deal of these organizational best practices. Of course, organizations should measure their impact, yet only an exceptional few appear to surpass collecting even the bare minimum data that funders require of them. Still, some novel findings emerged as well. Much like our veterans who come from all walks of American society, the findings reveal a great deal of complexity and nuance. For example, yes, of course, it is an inherently good thing for an organization to be well connected at the community level and to bridge the civilian-military divide—but it matters more to some organizations than others depending upon their geographic area of focus and the services that they provide.

APPENDIX A: OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

This appendix provides a brief overview of the 25 organizations selected for this analysis. The organizations are listed below in alphabetical order.

American Corporate Partners

New York City-based American Corporate Partners (ACP) assists veterans in finding and developing meaningful private-sector careers. Sidney Goodfriend launched ACP in September 2008 with the assistance of six initial—now nearly 50—participating institutions. With the help of business professionals nationwide, ACP offers veterans tools for long-term career development through mentoring, career counseling, and networking opportunities and has served more than 2,500 post-9/11 veterans to date.

ACP offers two main programs: (1) Mentoring Program, and (2) ACP AdvisorNet. ACP's formal Mentoring Program is a nationwide effort to connect post-9/11 veterans with civilian professionals from ACP's participating institutions, which include a number of *Fortune 100* companies and select universities. ACP AdvisorNet is an online networking and mentorship forum that allows volunteer advisors to share their business expertise with military veterans and their immediate family. ACP serves all categories of post-9/11 veterans who apply for the program.

American GI Forum National Veterans Outreach Program, Inc.

Founded in 1972 and headquartered in San Antonio, Texas, the American GI Forum/National Veterans Outreach Program, Inc. (AGIF/NVOP) is nationally recognized as a leader in providing community-based programs to veterans with special needs. The core of the organization is the Veterans Service Center (VSC) located in San Antonio. Following intake and assessment, assistance is provided depending on the individual's needs and case management plan. Employment is the mainstay of the organization, but following processing through the VSC, NVOP strives to meet its vision of a "continuum of care" by providing additional services, such as housing or healthcare, as part of its case management model with the goal of providing long-term employment, self-sufficiency and independence. Additional services also include basic job skills training, resume writing, access to career attire, and a food pantry, to name a few. NVOP also provides specific employment and training programs, along with services for homeless veterans and housing for the elderly, and veteran "stand downs."

America's Warrior Partnership/Augusta Warrior Project, Inc.

America's Warrior Partnership (AWP) began as a local initiative (Augusta Warrior Project) seeking to fully utilize existing community and veteran resources to meet the needs of Warriors (veterans and military service members.) AWP believes that no one who has served our country in any era should ever be in need of housing, employment, training, or health benefits. The America's Warrior Partnership service model focuses on engaging the individual veteran with a lead community organization through a navigator, who offers case coordination and advocacy that addresses all areas of a holistic care plan. The model empowers Warriors, their families, and their communities to focus on solutions, rather than problems, and to rely on collaboration to reach those solutions. This means that Warriors are referred to other local or national organizations for direct services, but the lead community organization always maintains a relationship with the Warrior to ensure holistic resolution of issues, eliminating duplication of services and strengthening the community while serving Warriors.

Charlotte Bridge Home

Based in Charlotte, North Carolina, Charlotte Bridge Home (CBH) is an independent community-centered non-profit that “helps Charlotte veterans successfully transition home after military service by identifying their education, employment and healthcare needs and connecting them to available community, state and federal resources.” Vietnam veteran and local businessman, Thomas E. Norman, founded CBH in 2011. CBH delivers transition focused services free to all veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, National Guard, and Reserves and their families, with anything but dishonorable discharge status. With employment as their primary focus, case managers work with veterans to find long-term employment.

Give an Hour

D.C.-based Give an Hour (GAH) is dedicated to meeting the mental health needs of the troops and families affected by the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Founded in 2005 by psychologist, Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen, provides counseling to individuals, couples and families, and children and adolescents. In 2013, GAH’s network of licensed mental health professionals included nearly 7,000 psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, marriage and family therapists, drug and alcohol counselors, pastoral counselors, and other professional counselors in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and Guam.

Goodwill Industries of Houston

Founded in 1945, Goodwill Industries of Houston provides education, training, and job opportunities to people with disabilities and other barriers to employment, improving the lives of individuals, families, and communities. The organization is a \$93M “social enterprise” that employs 1700 people at 49 retail stores and 51 donation centers. Within Goodwill Houston, the Veterans Job Connection Service Center provides eight veteran specific programs: Veterans’ Employment and Training Services (VETS); Incarcerated Veterans Transitional Program (IVTP); Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP); Female Homeless Veterans and Homeless Veterans and Families Program (FHVRP); Operation: Good Jobs (OGJ); Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF); Vets’ Advantage; and Vested in Veterans and Veterans Vested in Work.

Harbor Homes

Harbor Homes, Inc. (HH) serves low-income, vulnerable New Hampshire community members throughout the entire state. Established in 1980, HH provides high quality residential, primary and behavioral health care, and supportive services to more than 1,200 low-income individuals and families who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or living with mental illness and other disabilities each year. HH is New Hampshire’s largest provider of permanent supportive housing for the homeless and homeless veteran-specific housing. HH employs 350 staff across the six areas, of which 30 or more work with veterans. Services are available to any veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces who have been honorably discharged and their immediate family. Emphasis is on finding a placement for those who are homeless. Job placement and education are also given priority. HH provides all programs and services free of charge after veterans’ and other federal benefits are applied.

Hire Heroes USA

Hire Heroes USA (HHUSA), headquartered in Alpharetta, GA, is a national organization that provides personalized employment readiness training and limited job placement services to veterans and their spouses. HHUSA has five offices and a headquarters comprised of 42 full and part time employees serving veterans of all cohorts in all 50 states. The organization has assisted more than 7,000 veterans to date and remains dedicated to creating job opportunities for veterans and their spouses through personalized employment training and corporate engagement. HHUSA provides online and telephonic employment readiness assistance, including resume writing and interview preparation, through one-on-one interaction with Veteran Transition Specialists (VTS). In addition, HHUSA provides two-day workshops, held in-person on military bases and nearby locations.

Military Child Education Coalition

Chartered as a non-profit in 1997, the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) is headquartered in Harker Heights, Texas, but its reach is both national and international. The focus of MCEC is on helping students who are impacted by school transitions, separation deployments, homecomings and reintegration of family members, or injury and loss, to make sure that school and community members are aware of the needs and strengths of their military-connected students, or how to best serve them. MCEC is unique in that it exists solely to serve the military child, to make sure that they thrive, and to assert that no child should suffer the consequences of a parent's decision to serve the United States. Programs are delivered online, on-site, and through the distribution and use of the literature and materials written and developed by MCEC. MCEC programming is aimed at the following stakeholders: students, parents, school personnel such as teachers, community members and leaders, and installation representatives.

Operation Homefront

Operation Homefront (OH), headquartered in San Antonio, Texas, is a national organization that provides acute financial and housing assistance to active duty military personnel, veterans, and their families. Since its inception in 2002, OH has delivered more than \$207 million through cash and in-kind programs benefitting military families. OH has 17 field offices and a headquarters, more than 125 paid staff, and a large volunteer corps serving all 50 states. Currently, OH serves active duty personnel, veterans from all eras, and their families, though the bulk of OH clients are predominantly current and former junior enlisted.

Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing

Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing (PHWFF) provides physical and emotional rehabilitation to disabled active military personnel and disabled veterans through fly fishing. Ed Nicholson, a Vietnam veteran, founded after in Waldorf, Maryland following a 2004 visit to Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) PHWFF has six paid staff members, two dedicated volunteers, and occasional consultants plan national events and interact with donors, volunteers, sponsors and oversight agencies. The PHWFF program provides basic fly fishing, fly casting, fly tying and rod building classes, along with clinics for participants ranging from beginners who have never fished before, to those with prior fly fishing and tying experience who are adapting their skills to their new abilities. PHWFF is unique in that its volunteers teach classes on an on-going, long-term basis. The programming offers much more than one day fishing trips.

Soldiers' Angels

Soldiers' Angels (SA) is a national charity providing aid and assistance through virtual programs and services to veterans and military families. Headquartered in San Antonio, Texas, and founded in 2003 by the mother of two American soldiers, the organization's initial focus was to send care packages overseas and provide support to wounded servicemembers and their families back home. Currently, SA has shifted its focus toward support of VA hospitals and facilitating volunteer opportunities at VA locations. SA ostensibly maintains a database of approximately 115,000 volunteers who are managed through a network of team leaders dispersed geographically throughout the United States and Germany. SA is one of the few non-profit agencies approved to work within VA medical centers and collaborates with 19 centers around the country, as well as the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany.

Swords to Plowshares

Swords to Plowshares (Swords) was founded in San Francisco in 1974 by six veterans who were concerned about the influx of Vietnam veterans and their unmet needs. Swords' founding mission was to "heal the wounds of war" through job training and educational assistance, working with incarcerated veterans, and helping veterans obtain discharge upgrades. Swords now provides services to all veterans of all services across four core service areas: (1) Health and Social Services, (2) Employment Services, (3) Housing Services, and (4) Legal Services. Today, Swords has approximately 120 employees and an operating budget of nearly \$12M in 2013. Swords manages seven sites in the San Francisco Bay Area, including five residential housing facilities and two administrative offices.

Team Red, White, and Blue

Founded in 2010 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Team Red, White, and Blue (RWB) is headquartered in Tampa, Florida. Comprised of approximately 36,000 members, located in over 100 communities across the globe and registering approximately 500 new members each week, Team RWB exists "to enrich the lives of America's veterans by connecting them to their community through physical and social activity." Team RWB is an inclusive organization serving both veterans and civilians. Team RWB, and its particular chapters, hosts varied positive and encouraging activities intended to foster authentic relationships at the local level, connecting veterans with each other and members of their community. Typical events might include weekly running groups, hiking, yoga classes, functional fitness, volunteering, or social events. Although Team RWB serves the post-9/11 veteran population predominately, the organization inspires veterans from all eras to participate.

Team Rubicon

Established in January 2010 by CEO Jake Wood and Managing Director William McNulty, Team Rubicon (TR) is a disaster response organization with a clearly defined mission: "Team Rubicon unites the skills and experiences of military veterans with first responders to rapidly deploy emergency response teams." Since 2010, the group has evolved from a small cadre of individuals responding to large-scale international disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes in Haiti, Chile, Pakistan, and the Philippines to a group of over 16,000 volunteers responding to a more frequent, smaller-scale disasters across America such as tornadoes and floods. Since its establishment, TR has been part of the aid and rescue response for over 70 emergency situations. Although post-9/11 founded TR, most programs with a willingness and availability to volunteer and serve is accepted. TR views its volunteer base in three categories: veterans, first responders, and civilians with no military or first responder background who are interested in disaster response.

The Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service and Education Center

The Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service and Education Center (VMC) was founded in 1980 to address the multiple needs of Vietnam veterans. VMC has since expanded its remit to address the needs of veterans of all wars and conflicts, free of charge those eligible. VMC provides services, programs, opportunity, and advancement to veterans of the U.S. military and their families. The majority of the programming is directed towards providing assistance to homeless veterans or those veterans in danger of becoming homeless. VMC operates two campuses, its headquarters in Philadelphia, and a transitional housing campus in Coatesville, PA. Overall, VMC provides veteran benefit and entitlement assistance, employment and training services, services for homeless veterans, supportive services for veterans and families ("SSVF"), and diverse on-site resources at both the Philadelphia and Coatesville campuses. Currently, VMC employs approximately 100 individuals, 77% of whom are veterans themselves.

The Steven and Alexandra Cohen Military Family Clinic

The NYU Langone Medical Center established the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Military Family Clinic (Cohen Clinic) in 2013 with funding from the Steven and Alexandra Cohen Foundation. The Cohen Clinic conducts cutting-edge research aimed at improving detection and treatment of post-traumatic stress (PTS) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) and is dedicated to reducing the burden of these conditions on servicemembers, veterans, and their families. Dr. Charles Marmar, Director of the Cohen Clinic, oversees the study of PTS and TBI and is supported by a clinical staff, outreach staff, and administrative staff. In addition to its ongoing research, the clinic provides free psychological and psychiatric care to veterans of all eras regardless of discharge status, active duty servicemembers, and their families.

Three Hots and a Cot

J.D. Simpson, Lynette Simpson, and Richard Cislak, founded Three Hots and a Cot ("3HAC") in 2009 to address the problem of veteran homelessness by providing transitional housing and related support services. The trio first moved to Birmingham, Alabama, where there is a significant homeless veteran population, and purchased their first home for one dollar. Shortly thereafter, 3HAC began housing homeless veterans, of all eras and regardless of discharge classification, in the very building in which they resided and ran the organization. 3HAC operates eight houses (two transitional and six independent living) and which have housed more than 500 homeless veterans to date. 3HAC's programming involves first providing a homeless veteran with the basics and essential care—a shower, a clean set of clothes, a meal, and a place to sleep. 3HAC then requests information about the veteran's history, needs, and goals. 3HAC offers a mandatory, sixteen-week life skills course and provides referrals and transportation to a variety of social service agencies.

USO of Illinois

Headquartered in downtown Chicago, USO of Illinois operates the following five facilities that serve as its physical footprint within the state of Illinois: USO Naval Station Great Lakes, USO Rock Island Arsenal, USO Chicago O'Hare International Airport – Terminal 2, USO Chicago O'Hare International Airport – Terminal 3, and USO Chicago Midway International Airport, Concourse C. USO of Illinois is tasked with delivering additional community based programs to the more than 60,000 service and family members within the state. USO of Illinois provides a self-described "Continuum of Care." The Continuum of Care represents a period beginning at the point a servicemembers and their family enters the military, during their deployment, upon their return from

deployment and in preparation for reintegration with the civilian communities ahead of the servicemembers' discharge from the Armed Forces. USO programs are varied and serve the veteran, his or her family, and the community at large. These programs include Tickets for Troops, United Through Reading, Operation Enduring Thanks, and the USO Heartland Classic golf tournament, to name a few.

Veterans Enterprise Training & Services Group, Inc. (Vets Group)

Founded in 2004 by Joe Wynn, the Veterans Enterprise Training & Services Group (VETS Group) serves military veterans and underserved adult populations in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area with holistic services that support education, employment, small business development, and life success. The major focus of the services provided by the VETS Group is on assisting participants with finding employment, training or re-training, continuing education, and the requisite related services that support these efforts. Most notably, the VETS Group provides training and certification testing in information technology systems (IT), cyber-security, cell phone tower refitting (tower climbing), pre-apprenticeship bus maintenance, and is looking toward establishing training in solar and other energy retrofits, as well as physical security.

Veterans Leadership Program of Western Pennsylvania, Inc.

Founded in 1982 by Vietnam veterans, the Veterans Leadership Program of Western Pennsylvania is a community-based organization located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with a clearly defined mission: to provide essential housing, employment, and vital support services to eligible local Veterans, servicemembers, and their families with the goal of improving their self-sufficiency, sustainability, and quality of life. VLP provides services to all veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, regardless of discharge status, as well as family members. VLP provides services in four core areas of need: housing, employment, prevention, and connection.

Veterans Outreach Center

Founded in 1973 by returning Vietnam veterans, the Veterans Outreach Center (VOC) is based in Rochester, New York and is a premier one-stop installation providing supportive services for veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families. VOC, with 36 total employees, has grown to serve more than 3,500 veterans and families annually through a variety of supportive services in the five counties of the Rochester metropolitan area. The VOC conducts and delivers programming in nine specific sectors: benefits counseling, employment and job training, education benefit counseling, financial counseling, housing and temporary financial assistance, wellness and creative arts therapy, legal counseling and resources, veteran to veteran monitoring, and residential and substance abuse services. VOC services are available to any veteran and their immediate families of the U.S. Armed Forces who have been honorably discharged.

Warrior Canine Connection

Founded in 2008 by Rick Yount, Warrior Canine Connection (WCC), headquartered in Brookeville, Maryland, allows servicemembers and veterans who are suffering from post-traumatic stress (PTS) and/or traumatic brain injury (TBI) to train service dogs for their fellow servicemembers. WCC strives to "help wounded Warriors reconnect with life, their families, their communities, and each other." The pairing process is symbiotic in that it is both healing and restorative for the trainer, and the outcome is a trained service dog for a fellow servicemember suffering from PTS, TBI, or other physical or mental deficits. To date, thousands of servicemembers and veterans suffering from symptoms of combat stress have participated. Trained service dogs from its headquarters, a suburb

of Washington, D.C., are used in the treatment of veterans at the following off-site military installations: National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE), Brain Injury Unit at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Warrior Transition Unit also at Water Reed, Warrior Transition Unit, Ft. Belvoir, VA, and the Palo Alto VA Health Care System, Menlo Park, CA.

Westchester Community Opportunity Program, Inc.

Chartered in 1965, the Westchester Community Opportunity Program, Inc. (WestCOP) is a private, not-for-profit, multipurpose social service agency based in the City of Elmsford, located in Westchester County, New York. WestCOP's mission is to mobilize and effectively manage resources that will help the low-income and at-risk populations of Westchester, Putnam, and Rockland Counties become more self-sufficient. WestCOP's supportive services are designed to help both low-income veteran families and single veterans who are currently homeless or facing the housing crisis in the Hudson Valley of New York State. WestCOP serves any individual who has served in the military at least one active day and who was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable or a member of a family in which the head of household or the spouse of the head of household has done so.

YWCA of El Paso

Established on April 9, 1909 as a boarding house, YWCA El Paso del Norte Region is located in El Paso, Texas. YWCA El Paso is "dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all." According to YWCA El Paso, "no one is ever turned away, unless dishonorably discharged." The YWCA addresses homelessness, employment, mental or sexual trauma, and financial issues. The YWCA is closely aligned with Fort Bliss Military Base, the growth of which has triggered a shift in programming and services, focusing more on childcare, women veterans, and military spouse-focused services. The YWCA provides a myriad of services to include racial justice and women's economic empowerment programs, pre-school early learning centers, a health and wellness division, consumer credit counseling (CCCS), and a transitional living center. The YWCA provides all programs and services free of charge.

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH DESIGN

This appendix summarizes the study's overall research design to include case selection, data collection, and case analysis procedures.

The research team developed a comparative case study design that is both exploratory and descriptive.²⁴ Comparative case designs involve the examination of multiple cases of interest in which researchers examine specific elements or variables across each case for analytical comparison and contrast. Comparative case study projects in the social sciences typically follow a design logic intended to isolate and explain causal processes or identify causal linkages between two or more variables. These designs also usually rest upon an abundance of historical information, facts, or other data related to the case(s) under examination. *Causal explanation is not the goal of this project.* Likewise, detailed veteran-serving non-profit data are not readily available. As an alternative approach, exploratory and descriptive case study projects are established and valid research techniques in the social sciences, especially at the outset of a new research initiative when less is known about the topic in question.²⁵ Accordingly, this project is exploratory in that the research team aims to uncover differentiating VNPF practices; it is descriptive in that the analytical approach includes both individual- and cross-case analyses.

CASE SELECTION

The standard for sound case selection is whether the selection process suits the study's overall objectives.²⁶ Our chief aim is to elicit best practices from veteran- and military family serving non-profit organizations throughout the United States. This requires selecting a sufficient number of organizations that both operate at a basic level of operational effectiveness and efficiency and account for the remarkable organizational and programmatic diversity of non-profits serving this community across the country. Random sampling, while preferred as a social science method of case selection is, thus, impractical, as it would not likely meet our research objectives. Alternatively, the research team developed a systematic filtering process to narrow down a list of potential organizations based on pre-established selection criteria described in further detail below.²⁷

To begin, the team used the non-profit organization information service GuideStar USA, Inc., to identify 45,131 organizations (as of January 8, 2014) claiming to provide services to "veterans" (n = 43,451) or military families (n = 1,680).²⁸ The team filtered this list based upon those organizations identified as providing veteran- or military family focused supportive services within any one of six categories relevant to veteran transition: employment, wellness, family, education, women, and housing.²⁹ This narrowed the list to 7,707 organizations. Next, the team identified organizations that met specific financial and operational efficiency benchmarks³⁰ that indicate a basic degree of organizational effectiveness. This step reduced the list down to 613 organizations. Given the goal of selecting a diverse set of cases, the team subsequently selected 110 organizations across the

24 Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 3-6.

25 Ibid.

26 George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p. 83.

27 In academic terms, this non-randomized selection process is distinct from mere convenience sampling out of ease of access or proximity. Rather, the approach combines "purposive" and "most-different" case selection procedures. Purposive sampling is based on prior knowledge of the topic or cases and is used to achieve representativeness, comparability, or contrast. See Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed Methods Sampling: A Typology With Examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), p. 80.

28 The research team compared the search functions for both GuideStar (<http://www.guidestar.org/Home.aspx>) and Charity Navigator (<http://www.charitynavigator.org/>). The Charity Navigator search on "veterans" and "military families" only yielded 96 non-profit organizations compared to GuideStar's 45,131.

29 These six categories emerged in a comprehensive literature review as primary factors hypothesized to influence veteran transition. See Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF). (2014). *Insights Informing the Concerns of Post-9/11 Veterans and Families: A Review of the Academic Literature*. Report for George W. Bush Institute. Syracuse, NY.

30 Primary financial benchmarks were applied to identify those organizations meeting specific percentages of operating funds allocated to administration (<13%), fundraising (<20%), and programming (>67%).

six transition categories that serve either veterans or military families. In addition, to increase diversity, another 90 organizations were selected across three additional categories of geographical coverage (national, regional, local), founding dates (pre- and post-9/11), and organizations that receive government funding. This step narrowed the list down to 200 organizations, reflected in Table 1 below.³¹

From the list of 200, researchers thoroughly reviewed each organization's mission statement and purposively narrowed the list down to 20 organizations based on a deep knowledge of the types of services provided. Even so, several gaps remained across the selection criteria. Accordingly, IVMF and GWBI recommended an additional 17 organizations that filled these gaps and were thought to be worthwhile to the study. This resulted in a consolidated list of 37 organizations of sufficient variability across the case selection criteria. After lengthy dialogue reviewing and balancing the merits and diversity of each proposed case, the research team settled on a final list of 25 organizations.

³¹ In each category, the team selected every fifth organization listed alphabetically in an Excel spreadsheet. Since many organizations fall under more than one category, once an organization was selected, it was skipped over. As each of these organizations were identified, the team conducted a compliance check to ensure the selected organization's mission statement was focused on veterans or military families. If not, the team removed the organization from the list and found another organization using the same approach.

Table 1. Filtered Case Selection Process (from 45,131 to 200).

Initial GuideStar Search (1/8/14)	Total	Total with Reintegration Focus
Veteran	43,451	9272
Military Families	1,680	1326
Sum	45,131	10,598

Reintegration Category Details	Total	Met Financial Criteria *	Sample Method
Military Families Total with Breakout:	1326		
Military families, employment:	85	28	10: Identify 10 by selecting every 5th. If duplicate skip over
Military families, wellness:	72	33	10: Identify 10 by selecting every 5th. If duplicate skip over
Military families, family:	N/A	N/A	N/A
Military families, education:	628	111	10: Identify 10 by selecting every 5th. If duplicate skip over
Military families, women:	396	96	10: Identify 10 by selecting every 5th. If duplicate skip over
Military families, housing:	145	39	10: Identify 10 by selecting every 5th. If duplicate skip over
Veteran Total with Breakout:	9272		
Veteran, employment:	479	114	10: Identify 10 by selecting every 5th. If duplicate skip over
Veteran, wellness:	58	14	10: Identify 10 by selecting every 5th. If duplicate skip over
Veteran, family:	2939	287	10: Identify 10 by selecting every 5th. If duplicate skip over
Veteran, education:	1722	218	10: Identify 10 by selecting every 5th. If duplicate skip over
Veteran, women:	3277	129	10: Identify 10 by selecting every 5th. If duplicate skip over
Veteran, housing:	797	170	10: Identify 10 by selecting every 5th. If duplicate skip over
Subtotal GuideStar Filter (with duplicates)	10598	1239	
Subtotal GuideStar Filter (without duplicate)	7707	613	110

* Note - these numbers include duplicates for organizations serving across multiple program categories

Additional Criteria	
Organizations Receiving Government Funding	241
Geographical Area	
National/International	208
Regional	215
Local	175
Age	
Rolling Year 2000 and prior	431
Rolling Year 2001-2013	182
Subtotal	90
TOTAL	200

Table 2. Final Sample of Organizations.

Organization	Location		Reintegration Categories							Federal Grants	Geographic Focus	Pre-Post 9/11	
	City	State	Employment	Wellness	Family	Education	Women	Housing					
American Corporate Partners	New York	NY	X									National	Post
American GI Forum National Veterans Outreach Program	San Antonio	TX	X								X	Regional	Pre
Augusta Warrior Project, Inc.	Augusta	GA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	National, Local	Post
Charlotte Bridge Home	Charlotte	NC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Local	Post
Give an Hour	Bethesda	MD	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	National	Post
Goodwill Industries of Houston	Houston	TX	X								X	Local	Pre
Harbor Homes	Nashua	NH	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Regional	Pre
Hire Heroes USA	Alpharetta	GA	X									National	Post
Military Child Education Coalition	Harker Heights	TX		X	X	X	X					National	Pre
Operation Homefront	San Antonio	TX		X	X	X	X	X				National	Post
Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing	La Plaza	MD		X	X	X	X	X			X	National	Post
Soldiers' Angels	San Antonio	TX		X	X	X	X	X				National	Post
Swords to Plowshares	San Francisco	CA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	National	Pre
Team Red, White & Blue	Tampa	FL		X	X	X	X	X				National, Local	Post
Team Rubicon	La Segunda	CA		X	X	X	X	X				National, Regional	Post
The Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service & Education Center	Philadelphia	PA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Regional	Pre
The Steven and Alexandra Cohen Military Family Clinic	New York	NY		X	X	X	X	X				Regional	Post
Three Hats and a Cot	Birmingham	AL	X								X	Regional	Post
United Service Organization of Illinois, Inc.	Chicago	IL		X	X	X	X	X				Regional	Pre
Veterans Enterprise Training & Services Group	Washington	DC	X						X			Regional	Post
Veterans Leadership Program of Western Pennsylvania	Pittsburgh	PA	X						X		X	Regional	Pre
Veterans Outreach Center	Rochester	NY	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Local	Pre
Warrior Canine Connection, Inc.	Brookville	MD		X	X	X	X	X				Regional	Post
Westchester Community Opportunity Program, Inc.	Westchester	NY	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Regional	Pre
YWCA of El Paso	El Paso	TX	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Regional	Pre

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection for this project consisted of a multi-day site visit and semi-structured interviews with executive leadership and program staff in all 25 organizations. A joint team of three to four researchers from the IVMF, George W. Bush Institute, and Center for Research and Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University conducted interviews on site, face-to-face interviews. The research team took extensive field notes and recorded the interviews digitally, transcribed them for accuracy, and stored them together in a secured drive. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix C). Notably, the interviews were structured consistent with the overarching analytical framework and key themes, yet open-ended and flexible enough to capture rich detail both on best practices and other novel findings unique to each case. To further “corroborate interview data from multiple sources,”³² promotional materials and other relevant organizational documents were collected (as available) to supplement case analysis. In addition, the research team launched a parallel data collection effort via a nationally focused survey of veterans and family members focused on their perceptions of non-profit organizational practices and operations of that serve them.

CASE ANALYSIS

To analyze the case data, researchers followed a “structured, focused case comparison”³³ approach. To structure cases, George and Bennett stress the importance of first grounding the research design in an analytical framework appropriate for the overall research goals.³⁴ Section two of this report provides a detailed account of our analytical framework centered on nine primary themes hypothesized to influence impactful veteran and military family focused programming. Second, researchers must establish a common set of analytical questions to ask of each case as a means of ensuring “the acquisition of comparable data ... [to] contribute to an orderly, cumulative development of knowledge and theory about the phenomenon in question.”³⁵ Appendix D provides a detailed set of questions and analytical guidance (organized around the nine themes) used for individual case analysis. Researchers applied these questions in their analysis of individual case data (i.e., transcripts, notes, and formal documents) and final case study reports. Note that these 25 individual case reports will be published as a supplement to this report.

Following the analysis of each individual case, the research team conducted a cross-case comparison according to the primary themes outlined in our analytical framework. The research team developed a subsequent set of questions to guide comparative, thematic analysis of the key themes across the 25 cases. These questions are aimed at identifying key patterns across the cases with specific focus on commonalities and differences related to successful practices in veteran and military family-focused programming. The structured questions are provided below. Please refer back to the thematic analysis section for detailed findings of the cross-case comparison.

32 Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, p. 92.

33 This approach establishes rigor, transparency, and a common standard for comparison that allows for “an orderly, cumulative development of knowledge and theory about the phenomenon in question.” George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

Comparative Case Analysis Guidance (by themes)

1. Describe the strategic theme in practice
 - a. Re-introduce the theme
 - b. How many organizations fell under this study?
 - c. Very generally, what did this 'look/feel' like in practice?
2. Describe any noteworthy commonalities between the cases on this theme.
 - a. Were there any common practices/approaches?
 - b. Successes?
 - c. Challenges or other issues?
 - d. Other noticeable trends?
3. Describe any noteworthy differences between the cases.
 - a. Different practices/approaches?
 - b. Successes?
 - c. Challenges / issues?
 - d. Other noticeable, unique attributes of particular organizations?
4. List and describe any/all apparent best practices on this theme. Provide examples without showing favoritism (to the extent possible).
5. Describe any noteworthy non-findings (i.e., is there anything specific that we didn't learn or was absent that we thought would be present or more pronounced?)
 - a. If so, why do we think that was the case?

LIMITATIONS

Like all research, this study is not without limitations. The primary limitation of this study is the inherent bias of the case sampling procedure. While the sample of cases is diverse according to types of programming, it is hardly representative of the 45,000-plus organization in the veterans' services space and so readers should be cautious to generalizing the findings in this report. Rather, this research effort was *exploratory* and *observational*, thus, the organizations were selected purposefully with the intent to capture perceptions of leading, or impactful, practices. Each organization met specific selection criteria presumed to indicate a high degree of organizational performance. In addition, because there were no 'counterfactuals' (i.e., underperforming organizations) to compare against, it is not feasible to isolate the true impact of any one specific practice, but rather note patterns in their frequency or intensity of occurrence (or absence), and the perceived attributions that members of these organizations assign to observed practices.

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Orientation to the Organization

A. Origins & Founding Narrative

1. Organizational history/founding narrative – tell us your story.
2. In what ways have the programs, services and resources that your organization provides been informed by the community you serve (i.e. role of ‘voice of the veteran’)?

B. Mission/Vision

1. Describe your organization’s mission and vision today, as it relates to veterans and military families, and the origins of that mission.

C. Goals, Objectives, and Approach

1. What programs, services, and resources do you provide to those that you serve?
(Note: prompt/be aware related to Veteran-Serving Differentiators; RP1 Themes)
2. What outcomes are you trying to achieve? How? Why? What are the greatest challenges facing your organization?
3. Describe your organization’s efforts to drive quality in services offered to veterans and their families.

D. Who they serve / audiences / stakeholders

1. Who is your audience? Stakeholders?
2. Describe the individuals you serve through the execution of this mission?
 - a. Veteran demographics, service eras, etc.
 - b. Families?
 - c. Focused populations? (i.e. homeless, disability, incarcerated, gender, etc.)

E. Organizational perspective of desired/intended impact (i.e. In their words, what success looks like?)

1. What is your intended impact?
2. How do you know that you got it right / what does success look like (for your organization)?
3. What are the barriers to becoming more impactful³⁶ to those you serve?

II. Organizational Model of Effectiveness

A. **Strategy:** the organization’s documented and/or communicated plans to achieve objectives and meet priorities

1. Describe the organization’s strategic planning process.
 - a. Do you have one?
 - b. What role does the planning process play in informing practice and service delivery?
2. What is your plan to sustain your effort over the next five years?
3. Does the organization engage in periodic, recurring quality reviews associated with its service delivery model? Is there an ongoing organizational focus on quality assurance? Explain. (process, intervals)
4. What do you perceive to be the barriers to becoming a more:
 - a. Effective organization?
 - b. Impactful organization?

³⁶ Impactful: Organizational efforts with a demonstrable link to a measurable influence or effect on the issue or population an organization aims to serve.

- B. **Leadership:** the organization’s management team, and the processes and systems with which they lead.
1. How is your approach to leadership and human capital linked to your mission, values, and organizational planning process?
 2. Is your culture open & adaptable to change? Are you effective at managing change? Describe in detail.
- C. **Systems:** interconnected manual or automated processes leveraged as tools to accomplish the organizations objectives.
1. Given the organization’s mission and service delivery, does your organization value accreditation practices & if so, in what way?
 - a. Is there a recognized accreditation available to the organization?
 - b. What are they?
- D. **Structure:** The framework of the organization’s operations, which is the base from which the organization’s mission and objectives are carried out.
1. Given your organization’s priorities, are the decision-making roles and accountabilities clear? Does the overall structure of the organization support your strategy with clear roles, responsibilities, reporting relationships, and coordinating mechanisms to integrate across departments?
 2. Describe how the organization is aligned and resourced to deliver consistent and quality outcomes to the population it serves.
- E. **Human Capital:** the talent, skills, and characteristics of employees/volunteers that bring value to the organization.
1. Does the organization’s utilization of human capital support quality? Do you have the right people & what are their unique characteristics that enable quality in service delivery? Do your people feel that their goals and the organizations practices align with established priorities?
 2. To what extent is collaboration with other organizations leveraged as a means to supplement human capital in support of quality? (Note: prompt/be aware related to Veteran-Serving Differentiators; RP1 Themes)
 3. In regards to human capital, does your organization link individual performance to organizational performance to ensure accountability across the team? How? Describe.
- F. **Culture:** includes values, vision, norms, beliefs, habits, and behaviors exhibited by members of the organization.
1. How would your organization define a “high-performance culture”? Is there a way to measure this and, if so, do you?
 2. Are the standards of performance known, embedded & embraced within all levels of the organization’s culture? What are they?
 3. At all levels, is your organization aware of cultural sensitivities to those served?
- G. **Values:** beliefs or ideals shared by the members of an organization.
1. What are the organization’s values?
 - a. To embed quality & consistency, are these values reflected in its efforts?
 - b. Are they espoused at all leadership levels?
 1. How so?

- c. Is accountability a central thrust within the organization? Describe how.
 - d. Describe your organization's efforts to hold itself accountable to the veterans & families it serves.
- H. **Resourcing:** finding and providing the material, financial, or human resources required for a task.
1. Describe your resourcing processes as they apply to funding, capital goods, and day-to-day operations.

III. Measurement

A. Method/Process of Assessment

1. Describe your organization's efforts to measure its effectiveness and impact.
 - a. What do you measure? (Note: prompt/be aware related to Veteran-Serving Differentiators; RP1 Themes)
 - b. How frequently?
 - c. What do you do with these measurements?
 1. Does measurement enable decision making in the organization? Describe how.
 2. Describe the resources (human capital and/or financial) that the organization allocates to measurement, evaluation, and assessment?

B. Standard for Impact (Organizational Benchmark)

1. What value does the organization place on evaluating performance, effectiveness, and impact?

C. Role in Planning

1. Does measurement relate in any way to strategic planning, continuous improvement, and performance? How?

D. Role in Decision Making

1. Does the organization's use of data & measurement lead to greater consistency & outcomes?

E. Role in Continuous Improvement

1. Year-to-year, how does the organization refine this process of data collection, measurement, and evaluation?
2. Illustrate one area where measurement has led to transformation in your organization.

F. Transparency to Stakeholders

1. How transparent would you describe your measurement efforts & processes?
 - a. How does your organization account for transparency concerns?
 - b. Describe your transparency practices as they apply to key stakeholders.
2. Describe the organization's efforts to articulate (message) value to its clients, stakeholders, in the community, and to the philanthropic sector.
 - a. Are the efforts being received?

G. Measuring Effectiveness: how the organization tracks its own performance and defines successes in the areas tracked.

1. What is the effectiveness of the above efforts? How is that effectiveness measured?
2. Does the organization subscribe to any internal or external standards based on institutional or profession-wide expertise that it uses as a benchmark for its performance?
3. Do you compare the quality & consistency of your organization's outcomes, with any known, recognized non-profit performance benchmarks? Provide details.
 - a. Do they exist?
 - b. What are they (source)?

IV. Evidence of Veteran-Serving Differentiators (RP1 Themes)*

- A. **Independent Sector Involvement:** How an organization collaborates with private industry, NGOs, philanthropic organizations in support of their efforts to serve veterans.
1. What role (if any) does collaborating with other non-profit organizations, philanthropy, and private industry play in 1) advancing the effectiveness of the organization and 2) advancing organizational impact relative to those you serve?
 - a. With whom do you collaborate?
 2. Describe (provide examples) your methods of connecting and integrating your work with other non-profit organizations, philanthropy, private industry, and the community.
 3. Please identify obstacles you have encountered to successful collaboration with other organizations and methods by which you have navigated these obstacles.
 4. To what extent or by what methods are your local collaborative efforts supported by the philanthropic sector?
 5. Are there types of organizations that you have found to be particularly effective collaborators (government, non-profit, private, philanthropic; local, regional, or national)? Particularly ineffective? (E.g., "We have a very strong relationship with other non-profits in the area"; "We have worked particularly well with the local manufacturing industry"; "We have had a difficult time collaborating with our local VA hospital".)
 6. By what methods do you measure the effectiveness and impact of your efforts to collaborate with other non-profit organizations, philanthropy, and private industry?
- B. **Community Connectedness:** How an organization's program and service delivery model supports a comprehensive reintegration strategy through connection to the broader community (social programs, faith bases organizations, local community).
1. If applicable, what types of organizations and stakeholders within your community does your organization connect with in order to enhance your efforts and impact? Other non-profits? Educational institutions? The faith-based community? Community health providers? Government? For-profit companies and corporations?
 2. If applicable, what outreach strategies does your organization use to connect with these organizations?
 3. Is there a system for referring clients between organizations of various specialties to ensure comprehensive care? To what extent and by what methods do you feel your organization participates in an integrated web of support services for veterans and their families within your community?
 4. What role (if any) does connecting and integrating your work to the broader community in which the veterans you serve live and work, play a role in 1) advancing the effectiveness of the organization and 2) advancing organizational impact relative to those you serve?
 5. Describe (provide examples) of connecting and integrating your work to the broader community in which the veterans you serve live and work.
 6. Outside of your own, who are the community leaders and/or organizations that are driving veteran reintegration?
- C. **Social Connectedness:** How an organization advances societal engagement in the concerns of veterans by educating the community on the military/veteran experience. Also includes organizational efforts to connect veterans and their families with members of the broader community.

1. In the context of your efforts, to what extent are you focused on creating opportunities to engage non-veterans in your work, and/or educating non-veterans as to the community you serve?
 2. Do you see a military-civilian divide? How is it manifested?
 3. What methods do you use to engage non-veterans in your work (e.g., a volunteer program)? Do you implement means by which to measure the effectiveness of these methods?
 4. To what extent are you focused on opportunities to cultivate networks and relationships for veterans in the community? What methods do you use to cultivate these networks and relationships? How do you inform the veterans you serve of these opportunities?
 5. How are you using your platform to educate and inform the civilian/non-veteran community? How does it affect your ability to achieve your goals and objectives?
 6. Are there other any other deliberate actions that you take which are designed to bridge the "civilian-military divide" which you would like to highlight for us? How do you feel that these efforts or those mentioned above make your organization more effective or impactful toward the population that you serve?
- D. **Media:** How an organization leverages media to tell the stories of its mission and its veterans, or your organizations opinion of media's role in veterans' affairs.
1. What is your perception related to the role of media, as a whole, in advancing the concerns of veterans and military families?
 2. How does your organization use media to achieve its goals and objectives? What is your perception related to the role of media in advancing the goals and objectives of your organization?
 3. What is your organization's strategy to engage with the media on behalf of veterans and military families? How does your organization leverage media to inform an appropriate narrative of both your organization as well as those you serve?
 4. Does your organization employ a communications team or contract with a public relations firm? Does your organization have a social media strategy? What other ways does your organization attempt to shape the public dialogue surrounding the work that you do and the population that you serve? How do these attempts make your organization more effective and impactful in the work that you do?
 5. What metrics does your organization have to track the effectiveness and impact of this strategy?
 6. What are the themes and messages your organization communicates through media?
- E. **Transition to Civilian Life:** How an organization's programs and services ensure that veterans and their families are adequately prepared for post-service life, such as readying them to make informed decisions related to transition, employment, education, family concerns, and community reintegration.
1. In the context of your efforts, to what extent do you believe that it is important to focus (beyond your specific type of service delivery) on providing information, resources, and networks supporting the broader transition from military to civilian life?
 - a. If you do this, how? If not, why not?
 2. What does your organization believe are the most critical first steps a veteran and their family must take upon returning to their community, and how does your organization facilitate those steps?

3. What do you see as the major pitfalls that veterans and their families face when making major post-service decisions?
 - a. To what extent or by what methods do you provide information, resources, and networks to support the broader transition, making them better-informed decision makers with regard to their post-service life?
4. By what method (if any) does your organization track the long-term progress of its program participants throughout their transition to civilian life?
5. Where on the spectrum of veteran transition, does your organization fall?
 - a. If applicable, how does your organization's involvement in veterans' transition to civilian life (as opposed to being involved in post-service issues farther from transition) make it a more effective and impactful organization?
6. Are the veterans you serve unprepared for transition? If so, how?
 - a. How does that affect your ability to achieve your desired outcomes?
- F. **Veteran Programming Differentiation:** How an organization differentiates its program and service delivery model based on varying needs of the post-9/11 groups (women veterans, veterans with disabilities, etc.).
 1. Given your approach to delivering services to veterans and their families, is it important and/or necessary that you differentiate your service delivery model based on different cohorts within the veteran population (i.e. - women veterans, veterans with disabilities, differing generations, Services, MOSs, etc.)?
 - a. Where do you see these differences?
 2. If so, what led your organization to differentiate its programs? Was this differentiation built into the original design of each program or did the differentiation arise out of lessons learned? If so, please explain these lessons learned.
 3. If you differentiate your programs, services, or resources among the various segments of the population that you serve, by what methods do you do so?
 4. What additional benefits do your program participants gain due to the differentiation of your service delivery model? How do you measure the "greater gains" achieved due to differentiation?
 5. If your programs are not differentiated, why not?
- G. **Employment and Education:** How an organization ensures that its programs, services, and support network advance employment and educational concerns for the post 9/11 veterans it serves.
 1. In the context of your efforts, to what extent do you believe that it is important to purposefully focus (beyond your specific type of service delivery) on providing information, resources, and networks positioned to advance educational and employment outcomes for veterans and their families?
 - a. If not, why not?
 2. If so, by what methods do you seek to advance educational and employment outcomes for veterans and their families? If education and/or employment are not your organization's primary focus, by what methods do you either integrate these concerns into your focus or identify veterans with these needs and connect them with appropriate resources within an integrated support network?

3. If education and/or employment are your organization's primary focus, what metrics do you have to track the effectiveness and impact of your efforts?
- H. **Reintegration with Family:** How an organization identifies post-9/11 veterans' family-related reintegration challenges and tailors its programming and service delivery model to meet these needs.
1. What role (if any) does integrating the family members of veterans into service delivery play in advancing 1) the effectiveness of the organization and 2) organizational impact relative to those you serve?
 2. Does your organization provide any programming or services specifically designed for the family members of veterans or military servicemembers, or for the family members of deceased servicemembers?
 3. Describe examples of the methods by which the organization's service delivery system reflects a family-inclusive practice.
 4. By what methods does your organization measure the effectiveness of its efforts to ensure family inclusion into its service delivery model?
 5. To what degree or by what methods does your organization connect with other organizations that may specialize in supporting/treating family specific issues/needs that may arise during your organization's delivery of programs and services? Does your organization have a formal referral process to such an organization(s)?
- I. **Women Veterans Efforts:** How an organization's programs identify and address the distinct set of challenges faced by women veterans during their military service, and the consequences resulting from that service.
1. In the context of your efforts, do you believe it is important to tailor service delivery models, messaging, and/or approaches to engagement based on gender differences within the veteran and military family population? If so, what specifically does your organization see as the distinct set of challenges that women veterans face?
 - a. If not, why not?
 2. How does that affect the delivery of services to their population as opposed to the broader population of veterans that you serve? How do you operationalize those differences in the context of your service delivery models, messaging, and/or approaches to engagement with women veterans?
 3. By what methods do you identify and recruit women veterans to your programs? What are the greatest challenges in reaching and delivering programming to women veterans and by what methods do you overcome those challenges?
 4. What unique metrics, if any, do you believe are required to measure effectiveness and impact related to working with women veterans as opposed to working with the broader population of all veterans?

V. Organizational Self-Reflection

- A. What have we missed?
- B. Most compelling lessons learned?
- C. Input to better inform the Model of Excellence?