



SERVING OUR POST-9/11 VETERANS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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.

“Our warriors are the one percent of America who kept the 99 percent safe. And we owe them, and their families, a deep debt of gratitude.

“We have a duty to help make their transition as successful as possible. We recognize that in helping our veterans, we can unleash the potential of a generation of resourceful, determined, and experienced leaders.”

President George W. Bush
February 19, 2014

SERVING OUR POST-9/11 VETERANS

Out of the more than two million non-profit organizations in the United States, approximately 45,000 self-identify as serving U.S. military service personnel 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 offer a wide array of services. They range from guiding veterans and their families to proper health care to helping them gain access to schools to finding them meaningful careers and decent housing.

Naturally, with so many organizations, not all of them approach their work with the same resources and capacities; interestingly, studies estimate that veteran-serving non-profits are smaller than the overall non-profit population, with an estimated 80 percent generating less than \$100,000 in annual revenue. Differences aside, all want to help military men and women make the often difficult transition back into civilian life. Some are seeking how best to do that.

Out of the 2.3 million non-profits in the U.S., 80% generate less than \$1 million in annual revenue.

Out of the 45,000 veteran-serving non-profits, 80% generate less than \$100,000 in annual revenue.

Why we are studying the needs of post-9/11 veterans

The Bush Institute believes helping members of the military successfully re-enter civilian life is part of a national responsibility. The larger public also stands to benefit from veterans becoming in our communities the kind of productive people they were in the military.

Veterans, after all, possess a unique set of skills. During their time of service, they had to work within a hierarchy yet think on their own. They had to follow procedures yet adapt to changing circumstances. And they had to be physically resilient and mentally quick to solve problems.

These talents have made them leaders in uniform. They know how to take up assignments with a strong sense of purpose and a commitment to service. Once they take off their uniforms, they can become leaders in their communities, innovative entrepreneurs, and valuable employees. That is, if they have the right assistance.

For some veterans, the concept of “networking” to find a job runs counter to the culture of their military experience. For others, they may not know where to apply for jobs or how to best do that. For some, their post-traumatic stress may undermine their family relationships and even create financial disarray.

For all these reasons, the Bush Institute’s Military Service Initiative is undertaking a series of initiatives to help members of the military re-enter civilian life. Non-profit organizations that serve veterans, the funders

of those organizations, and the communities in which veterans live are a critical part of the transition. They set the conditions for a successful re-entry and fill a critical 'services gap' at the national, regional, and predominantly community level.

Our first step has been to determine the essentials of good, quality service for veterans who have answered the Nation's call in response to the attacks of September 11, 2001. We have sought to identify effective strategies and practices for organizations to use. We have done so through in-depth research that can help them better serve veterans.

The Bush Institute has partnered with Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families in this research work. The first reports, *I Am a Post-9/11 Vet* and *My America - Navigating the Post-9/11 Veteran Landscape*, came out in 2014. These reports describe the current 'state of knowledge' of post-9/11 veterans and their families and identified nine themes that can most significantly affect the social, economic, and wellness situation of this population.

The findings from those reports pointed to this unfortunate reality: the nature of an all-volunteer military service during a time of extended conflict results in a civilian-military divide. Eighty-four percent of post-9/11 veterans say that the American public has little awareness of the challenges facing those who wear or have worn a uniform; similarly, 71 percent of Americans say they don't understand the problems faced by those who have served since 9/11. That divide makes transition a challenge for veterans as well as the employers who want to hire them, the universities that want to educate them, and the families and communities that want to reintegrate them.

The research report, *Serving our Post-9/11 Veterans*, represents a step toward closing that divide. The report takes a unique look at 25 veteran-serving non-profit organizations, which is the result of case studies of these non-profits.

The Civilian-Military Divide

- 84% of post-9/11 veterans say that the American public doesn't understand them.
- 71% of Americans say that they don't understand the challenges post-9/11 veterans face.

We present these findings first to benefit veterans. We want to inform them about the types of organizations that can best meet their needs. Veterans then can use their talents in the workplace, in their communities, and for America's larger progress.

At the same time, we want to help guide the non-profits that serve them. To succeed, the organizations first must have a deep understanding of this population to ensure they are meeting the needs of these returning veterans.

We also undertook this work to inform philanthropies, businesses, and individuals. The private sector plays a critical role in funding the work of these many non-profits. Funders need to know what works so they can drive better care for returning veterans and their families.

What We Learned from This Research

The research team examined organizations based upon a number of factors, such as their length of service, types of services, and geographic focus. The efforts involved on-site visits and interviews with executive leaders and program staff.

The interviews and analysis were guided by a framework that relied upon 11 basic themes. Two of those themes focused on the more traditional elements of organizational excellence, while the other nine themes were identified in our 2014 research as those that can most significantly affect the social, economic, and wellness situation of veterans and their families.

The major findings from this research include:

FUNDERS DRIVE IMPACT

He who has the gold makes the rules (and is ultimately responsible)

- "A Standard of Excellence." Funders drive behavior and outcomes of these non-profits. The more demanding funders are with their goals and expected outcomes, the more effective organizations become, as does the likelihood that their services will be impactful and sustainable.
- "Not Just Funders – Partners." More than just financial resources, corporations and philanthropy must be good partners with non-profits they fund by providing technical expertise, outside evaluation and consulting, and innovative resources to serve the veteran population.
- "Measure and Assess." Funders cannot simply demand measurement, but must also foster innovation and outcomes by providing resources that allow for data collection, analysis, and organizational improvement. The lack of non-program directed funding has too often led to decreased investments in the organizational structure necessary to ensure good outcomes.

Successful providers use metrics to improve their services. Knowing more about the customers they serve allows effective organizations to help struggling veterans re-enter civilian life. Hire Heroes USA is a national organization that tailors employment plans and job placement services for veterans and their spouses. The organization uses its robust system of collecting data as part of its specialized work both internally and externally.

As an example, Hire Heroes USA tracks and manages the performance of its employees in their service delivery. Additionally, the organization uses career placement data to educate corporate partners about the value of hiring veterans.

Effective organizations engage the private sector. Local and national donors certainly help organizations financially, but effective organizations don't stop there. They draw upon the expertise of their funders in such areas as improving the organization's governance, designing innovative business models, and consulting on service strategies. The organizations seek out their knowledge for a number of tasks.

Goodwill Houston, for instance, relies upon an advisory council of local employers to help the organization create workforce development programs for post-9/11 veterans. When the non-profit designs a new program, staff members present the concept to the council. They want the input of employers. For one thing, they want their training programs to align with the needs of local businesses. Goodwill Houston then can equip veterans for the right kinds of jobs.

ELEMENTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Nothing replaces good management

- *"Leadership, Structure, and Process Matter."* Effective non-profits have mature infrastructure, culturally competent staff, and processes and systems to both deliver effective services and to collect, measure, and assess the impact of their performance. While the universe of organizations serving the broader veteran population is not new, the subset 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.
- *"Diverse Portfolios Equal Sustained Impact."* Effective non-profits have a diverse portfolio of funding sources that ensures long-term sustainable impact and allow for innovation, infrastructure development, and financial viability.
- *"Veteran-Specific Management Practices."* Effective veteran-serving non-profits have a robust case management system, a high touch model, and a cross-community collaboration and referral system.

Successful transitions require organizations to tailor their care. Transition is difficult, and while all veterans must find a new sense of purpose and belonging, they all have unique goals, aspirations, and challenges. Veterans must be treated as individuals, not as a monolithic group. Organizations that understand this critical point excel at case management. They also design individual programs for returning members of the military. They respect the broad diversity within the veteran population, providing unique responses to a unique population.

The Veterans Outreach Center in Rochester, New York utilizes an integrated community model to serve military veterans and families. It customizes services to fit an individual based on a broad spectrum of needs. Outreach Specialists, for example, will work with homeless veterans to address acute needs while simultaneously developing individualized educational and employment goals.

SERVING VETERANS IS DIFFERENT

Three things matter most in serving veterans

- *"Bridging the Civilian-Military Divide and Fostering a Sense of Belonging."* Impactful organizations foster understanding of the military/veteran experience and connect individual veterans and their families to the broader community.
- *"Veteran Differentiation and Individualized Case Management."* It's a people business; understanding the diversity of the veteran population and its range of needs leads to better support, allowing organizations to customize the delivery of their services to their veterans.
- *"No-Wrong Door and Referral Networks."* Effective organizations collaborate with providers who can strengthen or complement their work, particularly for those veterans who face multiple or intertwined transition hurdles.

By knowing their communities, and understanding the population they serve, non-profits can bridge the civilian-military divide. Being successful often means knowing the right people to call in a community. Something as simple as an organization having a deep Rolodex can help veterans secure a job or make contacts in a new town.

Organizations that do this well are deliberate. They work closely with community groups in dealing with issues like the stigma of post-traumatic stress. Or they explain the contribution that veterans can make to the workplace and community.

Swords to Plowshares in San Francisco runs an innovative training program known as Combat to Community. Leaders of the program work with mental health professionals, police officers, employers, religious leaders, lawyers, and judges as well as others to help them understand the unique needs of returning servicemembers.

Organizations that make a difference create social connections. These organizations work not only with returning servicemembers, they involve the surrounding community in their work. They are explicit about helping veterans cross over from military life to civilian life. This is not an afterthought.

Team Red, White and Blue is a national organization that works with veterans to connect them to their community through physical and social activity via local chapters. Participants include servicemembers, veterans, and civilians. They all participate in social and volunteer activities. The purpose is to create a camaraderie that breaks down misunderstandings and ends the social isolation veterans often experience.

To be sure, this research project does not cover every one of the 45,000-plus organizations serving veterans. That's why the Bush Institute will continue to deepen its study into ways to make transitions easier. Yet these findings, plus others in the larger report, present a road map for veterans, organizations, and donors.

What's Next

Of course, the next question is what to do with these findings. The short answer is organizations, veterans, and funders need to act upon them. Otherwise, reports like these sit on shelves, and that helps no one who has stepped up to serve his or her country.

To avoid that dead-end, the Bush Institute and Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families have assembled two toolkits. We will distribute them this year through a network of foundations, universities, non-profits, and businesses. Our goal is to help non-profits, and the funders who support them, assess their strengths and weaknesses and inform them about effective strategies.

These toolkits are a way to help organizations develop and sustain their work in that marketplace. Among other things, the strategies can help them focus their objectives.

We also will offer these toolkits as a way to empower funders. We will collaborate with a range of foundations to help philanthropies, businesses, and individuals understand some of the best ways to serve veterans.

Later this year, we will release a toolkit to specifically help the returning veteran and his or her family. The information in that toolkit will help guide them to the types of services they may require.

Our work is only beginning. Think of these toolkits as Version 1.0. We will keep modifying them as we learn more from research into the care of post-9/11 veterans, the non-profits who care for them, and the funders who support them.

Our post-9/11 veterans have answered the call and served their country. We now take it as our responsibility to help them successfully re-enter civilian life, where they can serve their communities, their workplaces, and their families.

“Many are coming home and are preparing for new missions as civilians. And I intend to salute these men and women for the rest of my life. And through the Military Service Initiative, the Bush Institute is going to help. We're focused and we'll be relentless in serving our vets.”

President George W. Bush
February 19, 2014