

FUNDERS EVALUATION TOOL

To assist in completing pre-award or pre-donation due diligence for veteran-serving organizations, the Bush Institute and IVMF have developed an assessment tool that can be used to:

- *Compare the candidate organization to a set of leading practices as a means of quantifying key considerations such as compliance and transparency;*
- *Determine how the organization compares to basic financial efficiency measures, and;*
- *Help substantiate the organizations' impact along measures of veteran differentiation.*

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), 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 themes demonstrated to correlate with advancing social, economic, and wellness concerns of veterans and their families.

This questionnaire is intended to be completed by potential funders, and is intended to assist in due diligence in support of a funding decision. First you will rank the different evaluation areas in order of importance to you. Then you will complete the questions in the remaining sections of the assessment, noting whether the candidate organization does or does not engage in a practice, if the practice is not applicable, or there is insufficient information to make a determination. To complete the assessment tool, funders will need their personal knowledge of the organization, the organization's latest financial statements and tax filings, and access to other information about the organization's reputation, staffing and impacts, which can most easily be obtained via the Internet. There are several existing resources to help assess generic non-profit efficiency and effectiveness in Appendix I. What follows in this section is focused on veteran-specific differentiators.

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND RANKING

1. Veteran Organization's Name:

2. Why are you considering supporting veterans and giving to this organization at this time?

3. How does this organization align with your interests in supporting veterans and/or military families?

4. How would you describe your giving goals? Do you have specific objectives you hope to achieve with your gifts?

5. Based on your giving goals, please rank each of the following areas 1-4 in importance to you or your organization, with 1 being "most important" and 4 being "least important."

_____ **Organizational Reputation** represents the extent to which the organization is known and respected in the community. It includes the integrity of leadership, the culture and values of the organization, its role in various partnerships with regulators, other non-profits and private industry, and the extent to which the organization keeps itself free from conflicts of interest.

_____ **Compliance, Transparency, and Efficiency** represents the extent to which the organization promotes accountability to various stakeholder groups, including regulators, partners from private industry and the non-profit space, and clientele. It includes how the organization measures its performance and financial stewardship.

_____ **Veteran-Serving Themes** represent the organization's understanding of the unique issues and concerns facing veterans, active duty service members, and their families, and their ability to tailor programs to serve this population. This includes assisting clientele with multiple focus areas in transitioning from the military back to civilian life, including seeking employment or educational opportunities, reconnecting the veteran with their families, and reconnecting the veteran to the community at large.

_____ **Ability to Substantiate Impact** represents the extent to which the organization can, quantitatively or qualitatively, share the outcomes of its services and programs with various stakeholder groups.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL REPUTATION

This section of the assessment is intended to help you determine the reputation of the organization. This will include statements about the organization's leadership, culture, values, and general reputation. As you work through this section, consider what you know about the organization's operations, short and long-term goals, and the people who work there. For each item, answer "Yes" if the standard is met, "No" if the standard is not met, and "I Don't Know" if you don't have the required information to make a determination. If the question asks "to what extent" something is true or untrue, use the notes section below the questions to document what you know about that item. The information you need to complete this section can generally be obtained via Internet Search.

Leadership

1. Information on the Board of Directors is publicly available.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
2. Information on key personnel is publicly available.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
3. Most members of the Board of Directors are independent. This would mean they have not worked for the organization in the last 5 years, they are not paid by the organization and there are no apparent conflicts of interest.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
4. The organization's Executive leadership has a positive professional reputation with veterans, the communities within which it operates, and with other non-profits and funders.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
5. Notes about this section:

Culture and Values

1. The organization has a clearly stated mission. This can be obtained via the organization's website.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
2. The organization has a clear values statement, consistent with the mission of the organization.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
3. The mission and values statements align with my funding organization's ideals.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
4. The organization has a strategy/theory of change.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

5. The organization's strategy/theory of change is tied to programs and activities that lead to outputs and outcomes that drive impactful results for veterans/military families.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

6. The organization is nonpartisan in its activities and keeps itself free from conflicts of interest.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

7. Notes about this section:

Existing Partnerships and Programs

1. The organization is part of a formal, or informal, community network serving veterans/military families.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

2. The organization has partnerships with other respected organizations.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

3. The organization has mechanisms to refer clients to other organizations for services/resources it does not directly provide.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

4. Consider the missions of the candidate organization and the missions of its partners. To what extent do these partnerships allow them to provide "total care"? For example, a housing organization might partner with or actively make referrals to an organization that does workforce development.

5. Notes about this section:

Reputation

Consider what you have heard about the organization from others. To what extent does the organization have a "good" reputation in the community?

1. An Internet search (such as IRS approved charities or Google) or other inquiry (such as an IRS determination letter obtained from organization) confirms legitimate non-profit status.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
2. An Internet search (such as IRS, Google, Better Business Bureau (BBB), etc.) or other inquiry (such as contact with state attorney's office) produces no allegations of fraud, change in non-profit status, or other illegal acts.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
3. An Internet search (such as IRS, Google, BBB, etc.) or other inquiry (such as brochures or other materials from the organization) produces positive feedback about the organization's mission and programs for veterans/military families.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
4. Consider what you have heard about the organization's impact. To what extent can the outcomes or impacts of the organization's programs can be substantiated by a reputable source?

5. Notes about this section:

Organizational Reputation Summary

Based on your answers above, please note the organization's strengths and weaknesses in this area. If there was information you did not have, how can you obtain it? For any "No" answers you gave, are you willing to consider any trade-offs?

III. COMPLIANCE, TRANSPARENCY, AND EFFICIENCY

This section of the assessment is intended to help you determine the organization’s commitment to transparency, compliance with laws and regulations, financial efficiency, and ability to continue operations into the future. As you work through this section, consider what you know about the organization’s metrics, feedback mechanisms, and how it is used to impact operations. For each item, answer “Yes” if the standard is met, “No” if the standard is not met, and “I Don’t Know” if you don’t have the required information to make a determination. If the question asks “to what extent” something is true or untrue, use the notes section below the questions to document what you know about that item. You will need access to solicitations, informational materials like the organization’s website, and the organization’s financial statements, tax filings and/or audit reports to complete this section.

Compliance with Laws & Regulations

1. Annual financial reports are prepared and publicly available.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
2. Annual IRS filings are prepared and publicly available.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
3. Audits are required by law if Gross Revenues are greater than \$500k. If applicable, an annual financial statement audit (Single Audit) is performed and the results are made publicly available.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
4. Notes about this section:

Transparency to Stakeholders

1. Information about programs and desired outcomes is available in the organization’s annual report.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
2. Consider what you know about the organization’s programs and processes. To what extent are measurement and feedback used to promote operational transparency to stakeholders?

3. Informational materials or solicitations appear to be accurate and not misleading.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()

4. The organization has mechanisms in place to collect feedback from its clients.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
5. The organization has quantitative and qualitative measures of effectiveness and impact to assess results (outcomes and change as opposed to simply output activity).
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
6. To what extent does the organization make appropriate disclosures about how donations or product sales will be used?

7. Notes about this section:

Financial Efficiency and Sustainability of Operations

The financial ratios specified below are offered as generalizable guidelines, broadly based on the holistic consideration of the range of standards of financial practice espoused by the various agencies and entities that provide oversight to the non-profit community. Importantly, the guidelines specified below are designed to account for the organizational flexibility to invest in infrastructure, measurement and evaluation, communications infrastructure, etc., with the end goal of improved programming and improved outcomes for veterans and their families. Accordingly, one assumption informing this tool is that ratios such as these should be defined uniquely as part of the relationship between the funder and the organization – that a sophisticated and informed funder should apply greater inquiry and insight into their investments than simply rigid adherence to the numbers suggested below.

1. What percentage of the organization's total functional expenses are spent on fundraising?
_____ Not Applicable/I don't know ()

Note: Fundraising expenses should generally represent 20% or less of total organizational functional expenses.

2. What percentage of the organization's total functional expenses are spent on administrative expenses?
_____ Not Applicable/I don't know ()

Note: Administrative expenses should generally represent 13% or less of total organizational functional expenses.

3. What percentage of the organization's total functional expenses are spent on programmatic expenses?
_____ Not Applicable/I don't know ()

Note: Program expenses should generally represent 67% or more of total organizational functional expenses.

4. The organization does not have a large reserve of unused funds – in other words, donations are going to fund programs as they are received.

Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

5. If the organization has borrowings, their quick ratio is 1 or more.

Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

6. If the organization has audited financial statements, there are no "going concern" findings in the auditor's report.

Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

7. The organization obtains funding from a variety of sources and does not rely on a single source of funding to sustain operations.

Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

8. Notes about this section:

Compliance, Transparency, and Efficiency Summary

Based on your answers above, please note the organization's strengths and weaknesses in this area. If there was information you did not have, how can you obtain it? For any "No" answers you gave, are you willing to consider any trade-offs?

IV. VETERAN-SERVING THEMES AND IMPACT

The Bush Institute has learned that the most impactful veteran-serving organizations are those that are not only effective and efficient by traditional measures, but that have also incorporated into their models of governance, service-delivery, partnership, and assessment a purposeful focus on impacting a particular set of veteran-specific issues and concerns. These concerns, referred to as veteran-serving themes, are outlined below with a series of questions designed to identify and examine an organization’s ability to adapt its model accordingly in order to drive high-quality service delivery.

As you work through this section, consider what you know about how the organization serves veterans, who they staff, how they are certified or accredited, and what you know about the organization’s program outcomes. For each item, answer “Yes” if the standard is met, “No” if the standard is not met, and “I Don’t Know” if you don’t have the required information to make a determination. If the question asks “to what extent” something is true or untrue, use the notes section below the questions to document what you know about that item. You will need access to solicitations, informational materials like the organization’s website, and may need the organization’s financial statements, tax filings and/or audit reports to complete this section.

Community Connectedness

Community Connectedness represents the degree to which, or methods by which, an organization’s program and service delivery model supports a comprehensive reintegration strategy through connection to the web of various social supports provided by the broader community. The most impactful veteran-serving organizations are those that 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.

- 1. The organization engages in strategic identification and vetting of community partners.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
- 2. The organization makes, where appropriate, formalized partnership agreements (MOUs, MOAs, Contracts) with community partners.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
- 3. The organization is part of a community of practice, which facilitates collective knowledge sharing and development.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
- 4. The organization participates in collective impact strategies to unify the resources of the entire community toward the common advancement of veterans' interests.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
- 5. The organization facilitates frequent communication and engagement between stakeholder groups – between partner organizations, government, etc.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
- 6. The organization has a defined outreach strategy to connect with community organizations for support. This is maintained in an outreach strategy document and revisited periodically.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

7. Notes about this section:

Social Connectedness

Social Connectedness represents the degree to which, or methods by which, an organization purposefully advances societal engagement in the concerns of those who have served by thorough efforts to increase the community's understanding of the military/veteran experience and efforts to connect veterans and their families with members of the broader community. The most impactful veteran-serving organizations are those that recognize that robust and community-connected relationships are key to post-transition well-being, and therefore act to cultivate such relationships for the veterans they serve.

While some organizations are explicitly designed to bridge the civilian-military divide, many of the most effective purposefully incorporate mechanisms to advance social and community connections for (and between) veterans and non-veterans, as a byproduct of their service-delivery models.

1. The organization, either directly or indirectly, works to educate the civilian population about the challenges service members face in transition.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
2. The organization provides opportunities to connect veterans with civilian/non-military members of the community through social events, volunteerism or other means.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

3. Notes about this section:

Independent Sector Engagement

Independent Sector Engagement represents the degree to which, or methods by which, an organization utilizes collaborative strategies across sectors, including private industry, NGOs, philanthropy, in support of their efforts to serve veterans. Effective veteran-serving organizations 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 donation checks. 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.

1. The organization has extensive business relationships with organizations in a variety of industries.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
2. The organization has strategic funding relationships to help diversify the types and sources of funding available.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
3. Where possible, the organization makes use of pro bono services from partners to improve or support service-delivery. These pro bono services might include program evaluations, data analytics, performance improvement, or other consulting services.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
4. The organization actively engages in business development, either by employing dedicated fundraisers, grant writers, or other staff that cultivate relationships.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
5. The organization has partnerships with local government.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

6. Notes about this section:

Veteran Programming Differentiation

Veteran Programming Differentiation represents the degree by which, or methods by which, an organization differentiates its program and service delivery model based on varying needs within subsections of the post-9/11 cohort (women veterans, veterans with disabilities, etc.). The most impactful veteran-serving organizations are those that 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. 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. Excellence is driven through individual case management, individually designed programming, or individually tailored care.

1. The organization identifies services based on challenges, perceptions, or attitudes within a particular demographic group or cohort, and differentiates those services.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
2. The organization has a holistic, personalized case management system to ensure uniquely tailored services to each veteran client.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
3. The organization makes strategic, long-term identification of audience, with sensitivity to age – the organization projects changes in demographics.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
4. The organization demonstrates cultural competency by hiring veterans or family members, providing specific training, or other means.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
5. The organization provides peer-to-peer training or programming that allows clients to work one-on-one with veterans or their family members.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()

6. Notes about this section:

Women Veterans Efforts

Women Veterans Efforts represents the degree to which, or methods by which, 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. The most effective veteran-serving organizations acknowledge and act to embrace differentiated service-delivery in support of these unique concerns of women veterans.

1. The organization is or has increased efforts to identify and serve women veterans to accommodate demographic shifts toward rising numbers of women veterans in the broader veteran population.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
2. The organization has a women-specific outreach strategy to attract women veterans to their organization to participate in programs.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
3. The organization promotes gender-sensitive access to services, resources, and care. While this may or may not require programs exclusive to women, the organization should make reasonable accommodation for women veterans as needed.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
4. The organization promotes cultural competence amongst the staff, including hiring female veterans to ensure positive client interactions and a safe, welcoming environment.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
5. Notes about this section:

Reintegration with Family

Reintegration with Family represents the degree to which, or methods by which, an organization identifies post-9/11 veterans’ family-related reintegration challenges and tailors its programming and service delivery model to meet these needs. Impactful veteran-serving organizations acknowledge and incorporate a focus on family, in the context of process, practice, and service-delivery.

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.

1. Programs provide support/programs for family separate from or in addition to programs for the service member or veteran.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()

2. The organization provides resources or makes referrals for family support services. Services might include emergency financial assistance, crisis counseling, or parenting courses.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
3. The organization allows family members to participate in programs alongside the veteran or provides the family information about the veteran's progress or care.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
4. The organization provides family-related resources or training to accommodate the unique needs of veterans seeking services at their facility, such as on-site child care or parenting classes.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

5. Notes about this section:

Education & Employment

Impactful veteran-serving organizations understand that education and employment are the foundation of a successful transition. While some VSNP have a direct mission and programs to advance educational and vocational opportunity for the veterans they serve, other VSNP organizations can indirectly support successful transition indirectly through partnership. Education & Employment represents the degree to which, or methods by which, an organization identifies securing employment and advancing education as the most pervasive concerns of post-9/11 veterans and ensures that its programs, services, and/or integrated support network advances these concerns for veterans it serves.

1. The organization provides individualized training and guidance to assist veterans in making informed decisions regarding the use of their education benefits, the best career path for them, or the best methods of navigating the employment environment.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
2. Where relevant, the organization focuses on both the "supply" and "demand" sides of the employment equation, preparing veterans for realistic and/or specific job opportunities cultivated through their own network of employers, which they have cultivated and who are legitimately committed to hiring veterans.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
3. The organization positions education and employment resources within continuums of services, resources and care. In other words, even if the organization does not have education or employment as its primary focus, the organization emphasizes the value of these things in a veteran's post-service life and provides information or partners with others to help the veteran pursue them.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

4. Notes about this section:

Media Engagement

Media Engagement represents the degree to which, 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. Doing so improves outcomes not only for the veterans and families they serve, but also for the entire veteran and military family community.

Most non-profit organizations serving veterans lack the resources to meaningfully engage with the media, let alone to influence this narrative broadly. Large, nationally prominent non-profit organizations are most likely to have a broader communications capacity, and thus an opportunity and responsibility to attempt to shape this narrative.

1. The organization attempts to promote broad, strategic messaging by a variety of means (direct mail, social media, periodicals, and television) to spread awareness of veterans’ issues, the organization itself, its programs, and its veterans.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()
2. The organization makes creative use of media to spread awareness of veterans’ issues, the organization itself, and its programs.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don’t know ()

3. Notes about this section:

Life-Course Transition

Impactful 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. Life-Course Transition represents the degree to which, or methods by which, 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. Whenever possible, the organization starts providing services prior to the service member's discharge.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
2. Wherever possible, the organization provides services directly on the military base and/or coordinates closely with Warrior Transition Units or other Transition Assistance Program (TAP) points of contact.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
3. The organization understands the value of creating informed veterans who are prepared to make critical post-transition decisions, and works to provide them with information to make the choices which will set them on a course for post-service success.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()
4. The organization supports the service member and their family in making the cultural and social transition from military to civilian culture. This means that the organization does not just address the logistics of transitioning – living arrangements, employment, access to healthcare, etc. Rather, the organization supports the service member in reconnecting with the community, either through sponsored events or referrals.
Yes () No () Not Applicable/I don't know ()

5. Notes about this section:

Ability to Substantiate Impact and Outcomes

1. To what extent is the organization able to articulate the long-term effects of its programs?
This can take the form of quantitative or qualitative information.

2. To what extent do those impact and outcome measures line up with the organization’s mission, vision, and objectives?

3. To what extent is the organization planning or currently engaging in internal evaluation efforts to determine and improve impact and outcome measures?

4. To what extent are the organization’s impacts and outcomes compatible with your long-term giving strategy and goals?

Veteran-serving Themes and Impact Summary

Based on your answers above, please note the organization’s strengths and weaknesses in this area. If there was information you did not have, how can you obtain it? For any “No” answers you gave, are you willing to consider any trade-offs?

V. COMPARE RESULTS TO RANKING

1. Based on the ranking in Section I, how did the candidate organization compare against your expectations?

2. Based on your understanding of the assessment areas, please re-rank each of the four assessment areas.

- _____ **Organizational Reputation**
- _____ **Compliance, Transparency, and Efficiency**
- _____ **Veteran-Serving Differentiators**
- _____ **Ability to Substantiate Impact**

3. How do the mission and objectives of this organization align with your giving goals?

4. Based on the answers to #1-#3 above, do you intend to give to this organization at this time?
Why or why not?
