



COMMUNITY SALUTE / LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS SERVING
VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES

Supporting Veterans and Military Families: Partner Snapshot

Museums and libraries have long served as place-based hubs for members of the public to engage in informal learning, access collections for educational or aesthetic purposes, and participate in civic dialogue. Across the country, changing community needs and priorities along with new modes of engagement have created an imperative to connect with and serve the public in ways that extend beyond traditional institutional formats and settings. Museums and libraries have begun to respond to this imperative. In so doing, they are connecting with the public in new and deeper ways, strengthening the social and institutional networks that support community wellbeing, and acting as catalysts to spark positive change.¹

Community Salute is an initiative of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), with the goal of studying how libraries and museums are responding to the needs of veterans and their families and developing new strategies to work with community collaborations to provide better services for this important constituency.² Community Salute is an example of the ways museums and libraries can work as community catalysts.

Over the last few years, veterans and military families have garnered significant national attention.

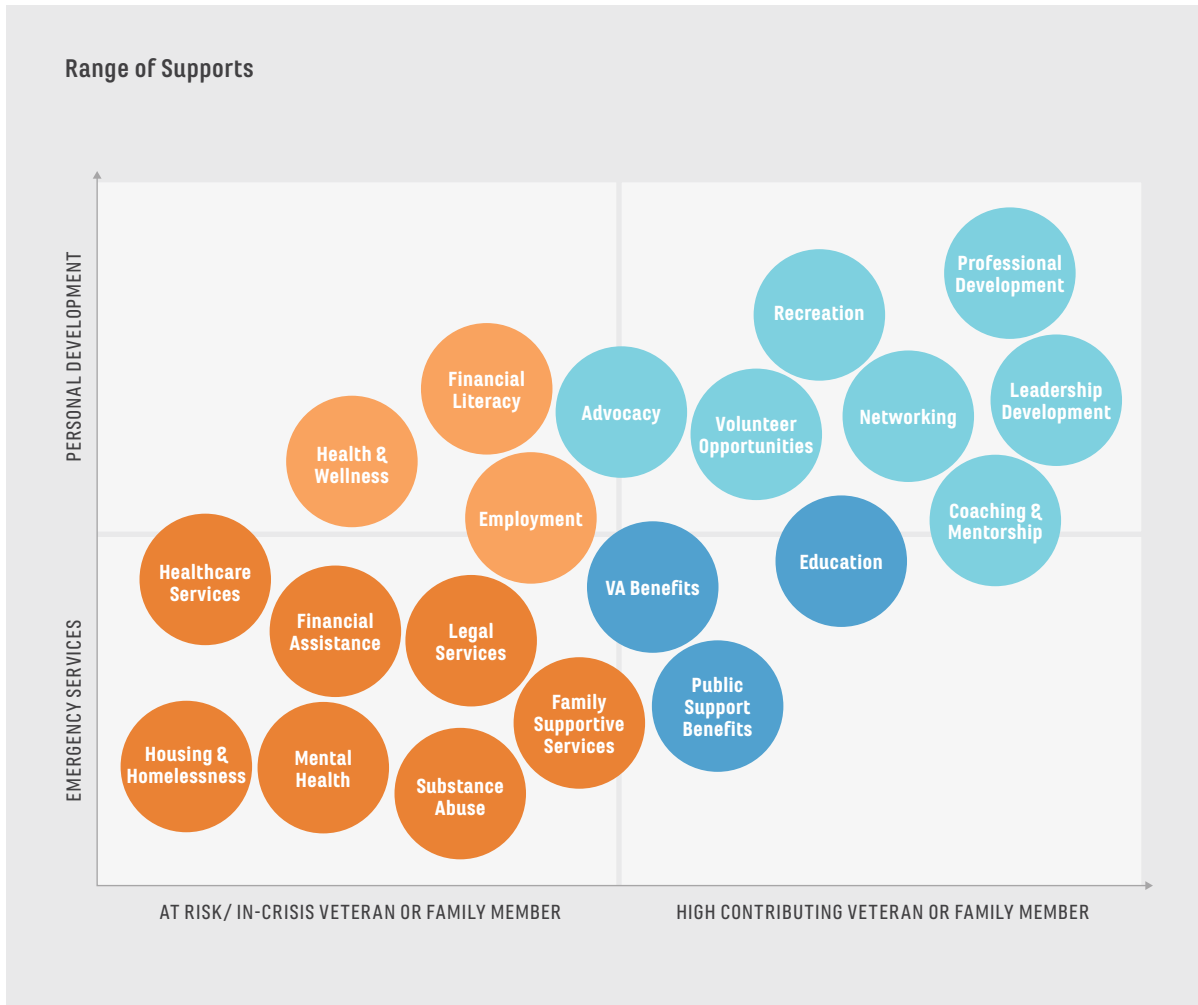
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, national campaigns led by multi-sector partnerships, and a growing social sector are dedicated to supporting this population. Museums and libraries are well-positioned partners to contribute to this work and bring a unique set of assets (research expertise, physical space, strong networks, and community trust) they can use to support and engage veterans and military families within their local communities. By partnering with groups and organizations that are dedicated to supporting this population, museums and libraries can help create a broader, more cohesive support system.

This brief provides an overview of the main actors already supporting veterans and military families across a variety of services and programs. It also supplies a guide for mapping the service providers within your community, so that your institution may begin identifying local actors and opportunities to engage.

OVERVIEW OF THE VETERAN AND MILITARY FAMILY COMMUNITY

Military experiences are distinct from civilian experiences. Research shows that veterans and their families benefit from support as they reintegrate into civilian society, particularly with respect to forming community connections, transitioning successfully into the civilian world and workplace, ensuring economic security, and maintaining health and wellness.³ And during an individual's active duty, his or her family may struggle with high rates of mobility and separation, low levels of spousal employment, financial instability, and difficulty accessing adequate childcare, due to the military lifestyle. While these circumstances sometimes pose challenges, they also represent opportunities to engage and support veterans and military families where it matters most.

Because the population is so diverse, it is important to consider the range of support veterans might need (see *Range of Supports*).⁴ Basic and emergency needs address some of the challenges that in-crisis veterans and military families may face, such as lack of employment or mental health services. Those with more stability may be interested in participating in volunteer opportunities or in professional and leadership development activities. While not exhaustive, this illustrates the range of opportunities your library or museum might have to become involved.



SERVICE PROVIDERS

Across the country, programs offered by a variety of cross-sector organizations are providing services to support veterans and military families. Along with the Veterans Affairs Department, a large group of intermediaries, nonprofits, and private- and public-sector entities work to provide these services.

THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

The [Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\)](#) is a federal government agency and is the largest service provider for veterans and military families. The VA system is large, complex, and includes three main branches: the Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefit

Administration, and the National Cemetery Administration. At a local level, you are most likely to encounter the VA through the County Veteran Service Officer, who advocates for and assists with filing benefit claims, or the local Vet Center, which provides a broad range of counseling, outreach, and referral services to combat veterans and their families. State Veterans Affairs departments complement some of the services provided by the federal VA agency.

The VA network supports veterans and military families in two main ways:

- The first is by providing specific veteran benefits. These include health insurance and services under the VA healthcare system; employment and education

benefits (GI Bill); disability and compensation benefits (for individuals with a debilitating war injury); pension benefits (for veterans retired from the military); housing and home loan benefits; and burial and memorial services for veterans and their families. To access these benefits, individuals must apply and meet certain eligibility requirements.⁵

- In addition, the VA can help connect individuals affiliated with the military to a wide array of relevant services. For example, if a retired combat veteran and his wife were to search for emotional and family support as they settle into a new community, they could connect to the community-based Vet Center and use the readjustment counseling services offered there. Alternatively, a young post-9/11 female veteran looking to further her career in the technology field could visit the County Veteran Service

Officer to identify career and employment services. Often, access to these services is not tied to strict eligibility requirements, but is open to individuals with a military affiliation.

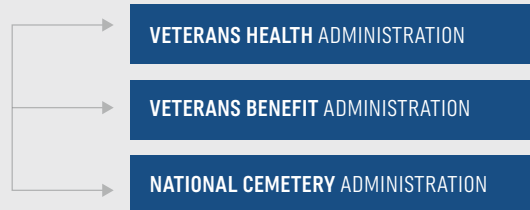
However, some individuals encounter barriers that limit access and use of VA benefits, particularly for health-care services. One significant impediment is the lack of a tracking system after discharge that supports veteran transitions into the VA (or other organizations). Unless the veteran voluntarily and proactively registers with the local VA office, he or she may have limited awareness and understanding of VA benefits⁶ Other factors, such as gaps in gender-specific and mental health services, result in limited access to these services, often by those that need them most. For example, female veterans are 30 percent less likely to enroll in VA health care than their male counterparts, even though lifetime female healthcare expenses

A Snapshot of the VA System

THE VETERAN AFFAIRS (VA) SYSTEM IS LARGE AND COMPLEX, SERVING THROUGH THREE MAIN BRANCHES AND OPERATING ACROSS MULTIPLE LEVELS



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



FOR MANY LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS, CONNECTING TO THE VA OFTEN OCCURS AT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND COUNTY LEVELS

State

State Department of Veteran Affairs

Federal

Federal Department of Veteran Affairs

County

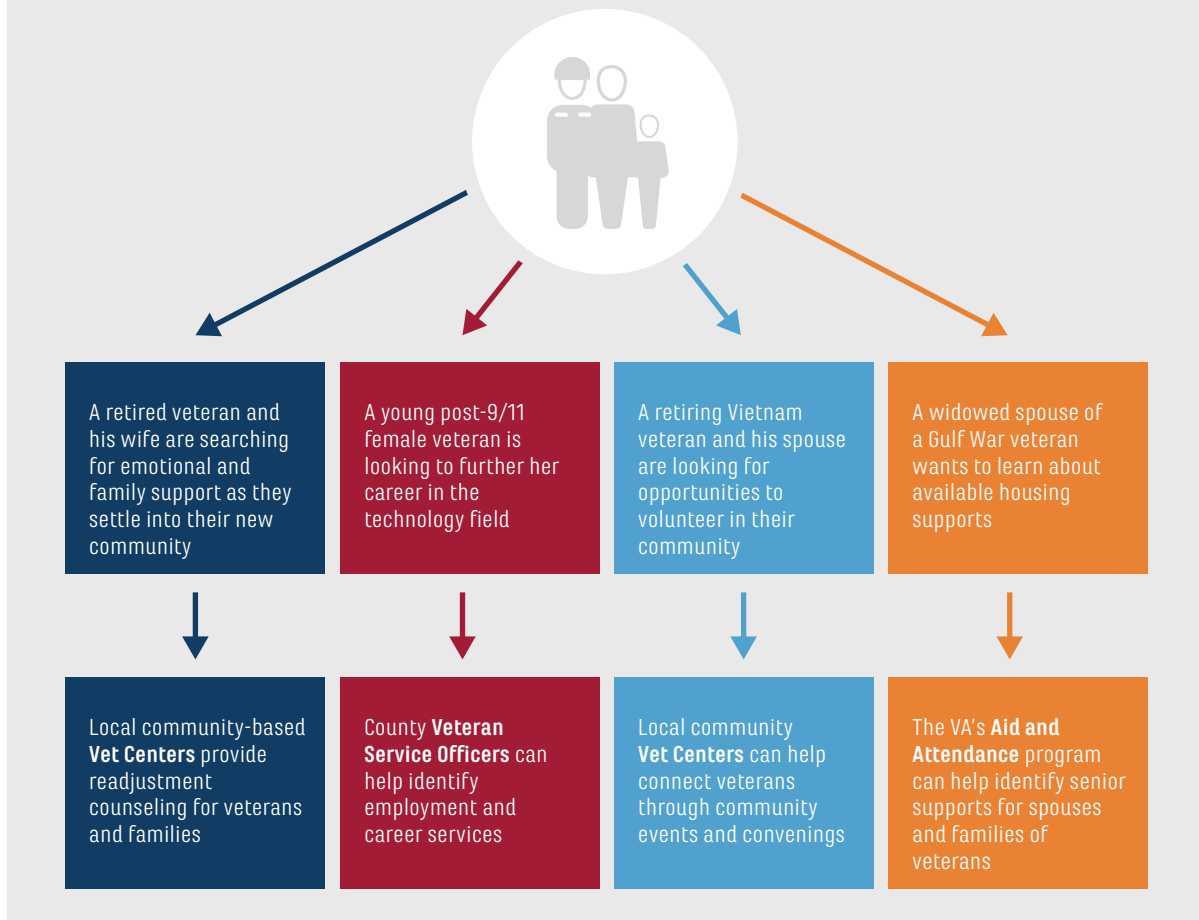
County Veteran Service Officer

Community

Local Vet Centers

The VA Not Only Offers Health Care and Benefits, but Also Has a Large Network of Resources

The VA can help provide and connect all kinds of individuals affiliated with the military to a wide array of services



can be one-third higher than male expenses.⁷ Further, veterans in certain locations may lack the infrastructure to access VA services. For example, those who live in rural areas may not have access to public transportation, or may not have a local VA institution to visit.⁸

OTHER PARTNERS

Over the last few years, there has been an increase in organizations serving veterans and military families, particularly in the social sector — the number of veteran-serving charities has grown by 41 percent since 2008.⁹ The landscape of non-VA partners typically falls into four large categories:

- **Intermediaries**, such as funders, who often provide the sponsorship or funding for veteran programs and services, but don't necessarily operate a program themselves.
- **Nonprofits/NGOs**, such as faith-based organizations or veteran service organizations (VSOs), whose missions are to support the veteran and military family community.
- **Private entities**, such as businesses and corporations, that sponsor or lead sector-wide initiatives to support veterans and their families.
- **Public entities**, such as colleges or cultural institutions, that are publicly funded and governed, and

provide services and programs to veterans and military families.

The services and programs that these types of organizations offer are slightly different from the benefits and services the VA offers. Rather than direct healthcare insurance or education funding, these organizations provide programs or activities for veterans and military families that are intended to build community, find employment, or even volunteer opportunities.¹⁰ For example:

- **The National Endowment of the Arts**, a federal grant-maker, partners with the Department of Defense, The Writer's Center, and the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center to provide writing workshops through *Operation Homecoming* to help injured veterans throughout their healing process.
- **Team Rubicon**, a national nonprofit, provides emergency relief services during natural disasters; its volunteer corps is made up of trained veterans who want to continue their service in the civilian world.
- **JP Morgan Chase**, a private financial services firm and one of the country's largest banking institutions, helped launch the Veterans Job Mission, an industry-wide workforce development initiative that is committed to hiring 1 million veterans by 2020.
- **The University of Nebraska-Lincoln**, a public research university, established a Military and Veteran Success Center, with leadership from its student veterans, to support educational success.

While a combination of these types of organizations may be operating within a community, navigating and accessing these services can still be challenging:¹¹

Those living in rural areas often lack the resources to access services.

"Rural vets are underserved, and [it's harder for them] to get to services. A significant number of poor and rural communities don't have the infrastructure that large communities have." –Researcher

There is limited awareness and understanding of "what is out there."

*"Both veterans and active duty service members report having minimal awareness of available transition resources."
–Blue Star Families Survey, 2015*

Cultural competency is often necessary to ensure effective delivery of services.

"Even though there seems to be an abundance of services, it's hard [for veterans] to get connected to services when they need it in the way that is comfortable [for them] to receive it." –Researcher

WHERE TO BEGIN?

Learning about the service providers and potential partners that may be already working in your community can help ensure that your museum or library complements and builds upon existing work. To get started, visit the VA [website](#), your local Vet Center, and your county Veteran Service Officer to learn about what is happening around you. Connecting with the VA can provide great insights into the military population and what services and benefits are currently available in your community. Then research offerings to identify which other organizations are already working with veterans and military families.¹² Because each community is different, the landscape will be unique to your locale.

One way of identifying your potential partners is through an actor map. An **actor map** is a visual tool that depicts the different individuals and organizations ("actors") that compose and affect a system. Actor maps can help you:

- Better understand current actors and their roles.
- Diagnose the level of engagement and strength of connections among actors.
- Identify opportunities to build new relationships.
- Identify potential points of intervention and levers of change.

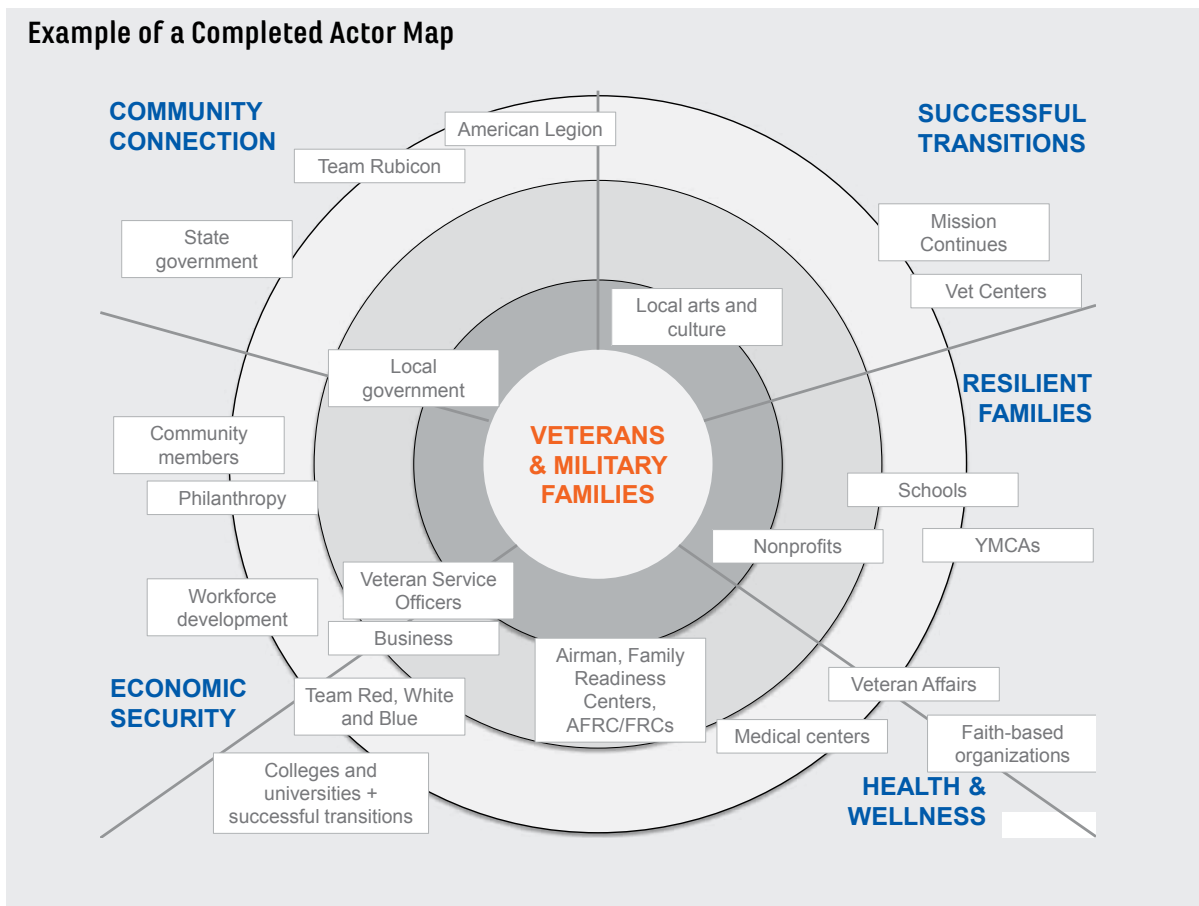
Actor Map Template



To create your own actor map for veterans and military families, follow the basic steps outlined below.¹³ You can complete your map with colleagues at your institution to build collective understanding and to source as many actors as possible.

1. **Identify important issues or opportunity areas that are relevant to veterans and military families in your community** (this can be done by completing a *needs assessment*¹⁴). This will give a frame to your map. The actor map shown here (see *Actor Map Template*) is divided into five different opportunity areas: Community Connection, Successful Transitions, Resilient Families, Economic Security, and Health and Wellness. (Note: these opportunity areas are illustrative; yours will likely look different.)
2. **Brainstorm, or research and identify, actors in your community that in some way affect veterans and**

Example of a Completed Actor Map



military families. Write each actor on a sticky note. Consider actors that cross different sectors (e.g., nonprofits, veteran service organizations, community organizations, business, educational institutions, faith-based communities, and funders).

To guide your brainstorming or research, consider the following questions:

- What people or places do veterans and military families interact with on a regular basis?
- What organizations support or influence veterans or military families?
- Who funds relevant people, places, or organizations?
- Who conducts relevant research?
- Who sets policy?

3. **Populate the map, placing each sticky note where you think it belongs on the map.** Actors that directly interact with veterans and military families are closest to the center, and those with less direct influence are placed further out.

Once you have completed this exercise, reflect on the placement of actors on the map and answer the following questions:

- What do you observe about the relationships that your museum or library has with these actors?
- What does this suggest about where your museum or library should build long-term relationships to support veterans and/or military families?

CONCLUSION

Knowing the other stakeholders in your community helps lead to new and deeper partnerships and highlights areas where your organization may be well positioned to contribute. For many libraries and museums, the local VA offices are the best places to begin understanding the different offerings for veterans and military families in your community. Identifying other stakeholders—in addition to the VA—can highlight the assets (such as content expertise and networks of relationships) that each organization can bring. Working together to leverage each other's strengths to pilot, expand, or complement existing work can help maximize your contributions. Librarians and museum staff engaged in this work emphasized the power of partnerships:¹⁵

"Every community is unique. Survey the veteran [and military family] landscape before embarking on new programming/initiatives for true ability to collaborate."

"Don't work in a silo. This is community-wide work with many sectors needed at a community table."

It is important to remember that in each community, a variety of programs may already offer services to veterans and military families. As you consider the different needs in your community context, remember you do not need to fill every gap. Rather, think about where there are opportunities for partnership and how you can leverage your unique organizational assets and capacity to determine the most appropriate way for your museum or library to contribute.

ENDNOTES

1. In 2016, the Institute of Museum and Library Services launched the Community Catalyst Initiative geared toward identifying new ways for museums and libraries to strengthen community involvement. To learn more about the Community Catalyst work led by the IMLS and its partners, please read the IMLS [press release](#) and the recently published report, [Strengthening Networks. Sparking Change: Museums and Libraries as Community Catalysts](#).
2. In 2016, the IMLS launched Community Salute: Libraries and Museums Serving Veterans and Military Families to help strengthen museums and libraries' ability to develop community-based solutions in response to veterans and military families' needs. To learn more about IMLS and its partners, please read the IMLS [press release](#) and visit the Community Salute [blog](#).
3. Craighill, Peyton, Scott Clement and Kennedy Elliot. "After the War: A Washington Post and Kaiser Family Foundation Poll," *The Washington Post* (2014), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/national/vet-poll/>; "The Military-Civilian Gap: War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era," Pew Research Center (2011), <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/10/05/war-and-sacrifice-in-the-post-911-era/>; Harrell, Margaret and Nancy Berglass. "Well After Service: Veteran Reintegration and American Communities," Center for a New American Security (2012); "2015 Annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey, Comprehensive Report," Blue Star Families (2015), https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/bsf_2015_comprehensive_report.pdf; Schafer, Amy, et al. "Passing the Baton: A Bipartisan 2016 Agenda for the Veteran and Military Community," Center for a New American Security (2015), <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/passing-the-baton-a-bipartisan-2016-agenda-for-the-veteran-and-military-community>; Cate, Chris. "Million Records Project: A Review of Veteran Achievement in Higher Education," Student Veterans of America (2014), https://studentveterans.org/images/Reingold_Materials/mrp/download-materials/mrp_Full_report.pdf; Guo, Christopher, Julia Pollack, and Melissa Bauman. "Ten Frequently Asked Questions About Veterans' Transitions," Rand Corporation (2016), http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1095.html; "Employment Situation of Veterans - 2015," Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor (2016), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/vet.pdf>; Price, Jennifer. "Findings from the National Vietnam Veterans' Readjustment Study," National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, United States Department of Veterans Affairs, <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/research-bio/research/vietnam-vets-study.asp>; "Analysis of VA Health Care Utilization among Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn," Office of Public Health, Department of Veterans Affairs (2015), <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/epidemiology/healthcare-utilization-report-fy2015-qtr2.pdf>; Kemp, Janet. "Suicide Rates in VHA Patients through 2011 with Comparisons with Other Americans and Other Veterans through 2010," Veterans Health Administration (2014), http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/suicide_data_report_update_january_2014.pdf; Zarembo, Alan. "Suicide rate of female military veterans is called 'staggering,'" *Los Angeles Times* (2015), <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-female-veteran-suicide-20150608-story.html>; FSG Interviews.
4. Adapted from: WAServes Pacific Northwest: Transforming Delivery of Resources for Washington's Transitioning Servicemembers, Veterans and Their Families, August 2016.
5. To learn more about eligibility requirements for specific benefits and services, visit the Department of Veterans Affairs website: <https://www.va.gov>.
6. Harrell, Margaret and Nancy Berglass. "Well After Service: Veteran Reintegration and American Communities," Center for a New American Security (2012).
7. "Strategies for Serving Our Women Veterans," Women's Task Force, Department of Veterans Affairs (2012).
8. "Characteristics of Rural Veterans: 2014 Data from the American Community Survey" (presentation), National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2016), https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Rural_Veterans_ACS2014_FINAL.pdf; Brenchley, Cameron. "President Obama signs bill to give VA resources to improve Veterans' care," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2014), <http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/15017/president-obama-signs-bill-to-give-va-resources-to-improve-veterans-care/>; FSG Interviews.
9. "A Donor's Guide to Serving the Needs of Veterans and the Military," *Charity Watch* (2015), <https://www.charitywatch.org/charitywatch-articles/a-donor-39-s-guide-to-serving-the-needs-of-veterans-and-the-military/150>.
10. National Endowment for the Arts [website](#); Team Rubicon [website](#); Veteran Jobs Mission [website](#); Operation Homecoming [website](#); University of Nebraska-Lincoln [website](#); FSG Interviews.
11. "2015 Annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey, Comprehensive Report," Blue Star Families (2015), https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/bsf_2015_comprehensive_report.pdf; FSG Interviews.
12. Learning about the programs and services already available to veterans and military families locally is a useful way to determine which organizations are already supporting the community. Visit community organizations' websites, read local newspapers and community bulletins, and connect with organizations beyond the usual suspects. Consider connecting with community-based veteran-serving organizations, but also with faith-based institutions and community foundations that may have deep connections to military communities. Research and learn about different programs and services that may be, directly or indirectly, engaging the military community (service and volunteer programs for veterans, computer literacy classes supplemented with case-management support, etc.).
13. To learn more about actor mapping, including more detailed instructions, visit FSG's [Systems Mapping: A Guide to Developing Actor Maps](#) tool.
14. A needs assessment is a tool that can help you better understand the unique characteristics of your local military community. Most communities have demographic data available — census data is often a great first resource to learn about your local characteristics and demographics. Additionally, consider reaching out to organizations that serve the population to learn about the relevant issues (e.g., health and wellness, homelessness, underemployment). The San Antonio-based Military and Veteran Community Collaborative (MVCC) provides a good example of a needs assessment. Its 2016 Needs Assessment for the San Antonio area elevates major issues including employment, health and wellness, and homelessness rates within the community. To learn more about the San Antonio 2016 Needs Assessment, visit the [MVCC website](#) and read the [report](#).
15. Community Salute Town Hall, 16-17 November, 2016. San Antonio, TX; FSG Interviews.

FIGURE ENDNOTES

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1. Adapted from: WAServes Pacific Northwest: Transforming Delivery of Resources for Washington's Transitioning Servicemembers, Veterans and Their Families, August 2016.

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1. Veteran Affairs website www.va.gov, http://www.va.gov/vso/VSO-Directory_2013-2014.pdf.

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1. U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs: Vet Center Program website <http://www.vetcenter.va.gov>; FSG Interviews.

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1. Completed actor map example: Community Salute Town Hall, 16-17 November, 2016. San Antonio, TX.

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Our mission has been to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. For the past 20 years, our grant making, policy development, and research has helped libraries and museums deliver valuable services that make it possible for communities and individuals to thrive.

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