



COMMUNITY SALUTE / LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS SERVING
VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES

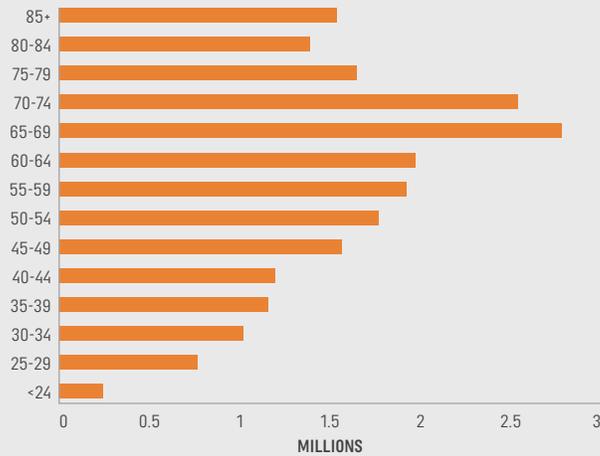
Supporting Veterans and Military Families: Understanding The Community

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.

Veteran Demographics

VETERANS BY AGE¹



6.8%

of the total
U.S. POPULATION
are veterans

VETERANS BY COHORT OF WAR²



1.8 MILLION

Korean War

3.4 MILLION

Vietnam War

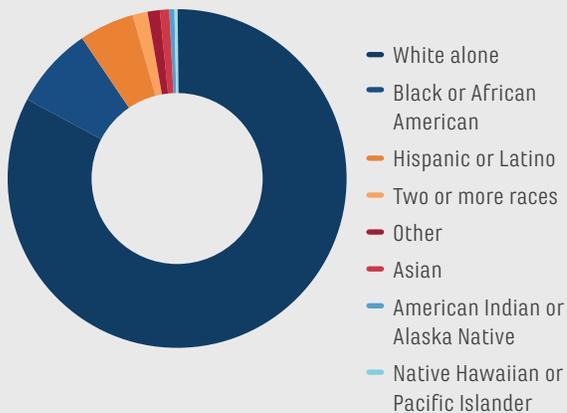
700 THOUSAND

Persian Gulf War

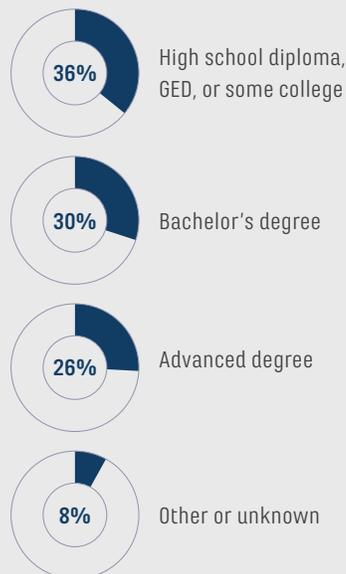
2.7 MILLION

Post-9/11 Wars

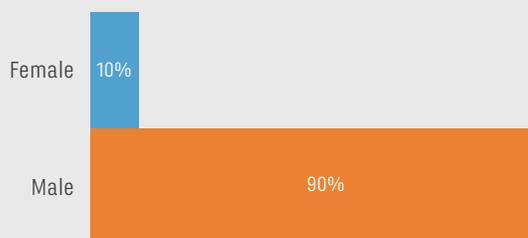
VETERANS BY RACE AND ETHNICITY¹



VETERANS BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT²



VETERANS BY GENDER¹

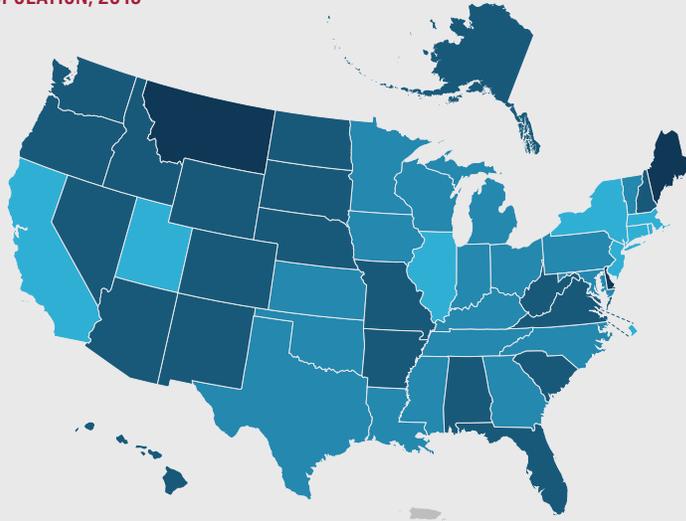


Nearly All Communities in the United States Have Some Connection to Military Experiences

VETERANS AS PERCENTAGE OF STATE POPULATION, 2013

PERCENT OF STATE POPULATION

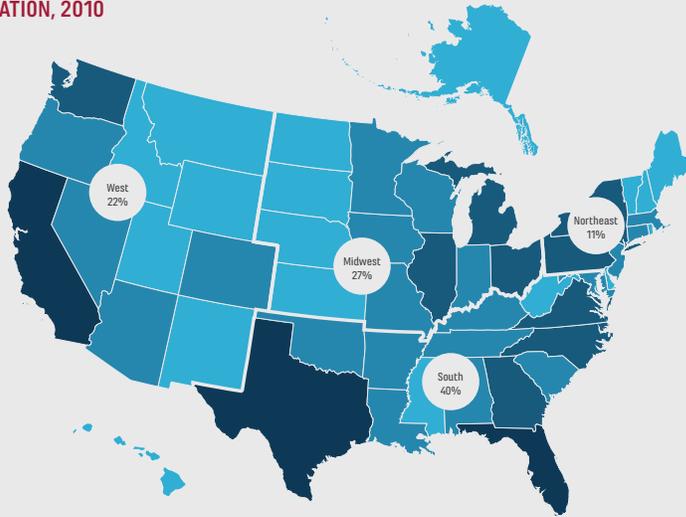
- 12.0% - 13.8% [3]
- 10.0% - 11.9% [22]
- 8.0% - 9.9% [18]
- 6.0% - 7.9% [8]
- 3.8% [PUERTO RICO]



PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL VETERAN POPULATION, 2010

PERCENTAGE

- 7.1 - 9.7
- 5.1 - 7.0
- 2.6 - 5.0
- 1.1 - 2.5
- 0.2 - 1.0



VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES BUILD COMMUNITY IN EVERY STATE

22M

veterans live in the U.S., representing 6.8 percent of the total population

725k

spouses support active duty service members

15M

spouses and their families support veterans

50 states

National Guard serves in every state

Although they may not be aware of it, most civilians regularly engage with someone affiliated with the military.

With 22 million veterans and some 725,000 active duty military spouses across the country, veterans and military families are building lives and deepening roots in the communities they serve.³ Despite their presence in communities across the country, many civilians, organizations, and communities continue to have limited understanding of the military population and experience.

Veterans and military families in your community may already be using the services and programs your library or museum offers. This brief provides museums and libraries with an overview of the characteristics, challenges, and experiences faced by veterans and military families in order to help increase understanding and provide a starting point for continued learning and engagement with the military community.

VETERAN COMMUNITY

Veterans represent a significant portion of the population — about 6.8 percent — yet they often go unnoticed by civilians.⁴ Many veterans choose not to self-identify for a variety of reasons: some may have served a short time and consider only a long-term career as qualifying for veteran status; others may have had negative or traumatic experiences they don't wish to share; while still others may have worked in non-combat positions and don't consider themselves a veteran of war.⁵

Further, no single entity tracks veterans after service. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) only records veterans who voluntarily and pro-actively connect with them.⁶ And that is a fairly limited number, as only 27.5 percent of veterans nationwide use the healthcare benefits they may be eligible to receive by the VA.⁷

This lack of visibility allows for misperceptions that are highlighted in the media. The common portrayal of a veteran suffering from mental health or substance abuse issues emphasizes the tale of the “broken” veteran. Movies frequently depict “war heroes” who participated in active combat and seek recognition for their service or sacrifice. Or we see the story of the “enlisted” veteran who entered the military for lack of other opportunities. While these narratives represent some segments of the population, the breadth of veteran experiences is tremendous and not nearly as narrowly defined.

These misperceptions illustrate the “military-civilian divide,” a gap in understanding between the military experience and the civilian world.

According to the Pew Research Center, 71 percent of civilians say they have little to no understanding of the military experience despite a strong appreciation for the military.⁸ As the military continues to shrink and fewer individuals serve, the connections between military personnel and the broader civilian population also appear to be shrinking.⁹ Even people directly related to a veteran or service member may not fully understand the depth and nuance of the military experience, which is very distinct from the civilian experience. From day one at boot camp, service members abandon their civilian habits for a highly structured routine and hierarchical environment. Combat zone experiences are often beyond comprehension for the average civilian.¹⁰

“For the most part, the majority of the issues we talk about in the media [about veterans] don’t apply to the majority of this population.”
- Researcher

These experiences are deeply rooted in veterans and often influence their civilian life. Research indicates that veterans may benefit from support in four core areas as they reintegrate into civilian society.¹¹ These include:

- **Forming community connections:** For many veterans, the military provided a strong sense of community and camaraderie that they continue to seek out in the civilian world. But the highly mobile nature of the military (moving frequently to new posts,

Misperceptions About the Veteran Community

SOCIETY PERCEIVES VETERANS...



...often suffer from mental health and/or substance abuse issues



...entered the military as an alternative to college



...all participated in active combat



...want to be perceived as heroes



...want to be recognized for their service

In Reality, the Veteran Population is Diverse and Heterogeneous

VETERANS TODAY:

~1M

veterans are <30 years old¹

~500k

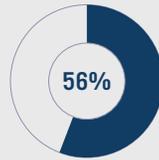
veterans in the U.S. are foreign born⁵

~10M

veterans are of retirement age or older¹



of veterans are female¹



have a bachelor's degree or higher²

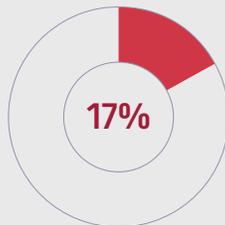


of veterans 18-34 are of nonwhite race and ethnicity³

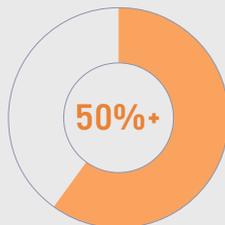


of occupations are in noncombat-specific positions⁴

THE VETERAN POPULATION IS LIKELY TO BECOME MORE DIVERSE IN THE FUTURE...



of active duty military is female¹



of the active duty military is <24 years old²

...AND WILL COVER EVEN MORE DIVERSE MILITARY EXPERIENCES

*"The military's role has been **expanded** far beyond the traditional battlefield, into areas such as **nation-building** and **cybersecurity**, [resulting] in an almost incomprehensible military experience to the average American."⁶*

deployment, and separation from civilian communities) can make it hard to maintain relationships and connections. When it's time for veterans to put down roots permanently, many feel disconnected from social networks and communities. Opportunities for military-civilian engagement intended to create new relationships and expand social circles are limited.

- **Transitioning successfully:** The period immediately after service members are discharged is particularly critical as new veterans begin building the foundation for their civilian life. Many seek initial employment or education and training that may sustain long-term employment. Yet veterans often find that skills they developed while in service are not readily transferable to civilian positions and that cultural reintegration into a civilian workplace requires time and constant attention. In addition, the initial transition period often requires navigating a complex system to receive earned benefits and services (e.g., GI Bill, health care). If a veteran does not live near

a military support system, he or she may have difficulty accessing and using these services.

- **Ensuring economic security:** Forty-one percent of veterans describe their financial transition as difficult or very difficult.¹² The highly mobile military lifestyle affects long-term economic stability for veterans and their families, as the unexpected and often high costs associated with moves can challenge financial planning and stability. Service members transitioning out of active duty may receive varying levels of financial literacy training or explanation of benefits that would help them as they move into their next phase of life.
- **Maintaining health and wellness:** Preserving and improving physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing is particularly important. Many veterans have complex health needs, from invisible wounds that affect mental health to physical wounds, such as loss of limbs. Yet, confusing and fragmented healthcare delivery systems present challenges for veterans seeking to access the health care they need.

Unique Experiences in the Civilian World

<p>Community Connection</p> <p>64% of those who served in combat feel disconnected from civilian life¹</p> <p>44% of modern-day veterans report they have had difficulties readjusting to civilian life²</p> <p>45% of veteran respondents to the BSF annual survey felt they did not always have sufficient information to vote in local elections³</p>	<p>Successful Transitions</p> <p>61% pre-9/11 and 65% post-9/11 service members living in Chicago left the military without a job⁴</p> <p>GI Bill funds tend to be underutilized by veterans and only 8% transfer the benefit to their family⁵</p> <p>Veterans are typically older, have families and enroll as part-time students: nearly 60% take six years to complete a Bachelor's degree⁶</p> <p>Many employers have difficulty understanding how military skills match civilian job requirements⁷</p>
<p>Economic Security</p> <p>87% say financial readiness training (before discharge) should be more individualized³</p> <p>41% describe their financial transition as difficult or very difficult post-service³</p> <p>Post-9/11 veteran unemployment was 5.2% in Fall 2016⁸ and among half million unemployed veterans in the U.S., 60% are age 45 or over⁹</p> <p>Only 38,076 WW2 veterans received Aid and Attendance pension benefits in 2011¹⁰</p>	<p>Health & Wellness</p> <p>4 in 5 Vietnam veterans report chronic PTSD symptoms 20-25 years after Vietnam War¹¹</p> <p>23% of post-9/11 veterans receiving care at Veteran Affairs facilities have been diagnosed with a mental health issue¹²</p> <p>Suicide is six times higher amongst female veterans than their civilian counterparts¹³</p> <p>About half of veterans experienced strains in family relations since leaving the military²</p>

HEALTH CARE FOR VETERANS

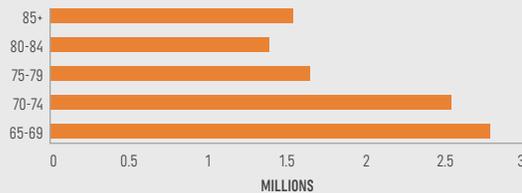
While some health challenges are immediately evident as a veteran's journey begins, others persist well into the veteran's life. Injuries, both physical and mental, can create long-term health and wellness needs that the veteran may not have the resources or support to care for.

As veterans enter their senior years, maintaining their health can become a particularly acute challenge. Forty-six percent of the total veteran population is 65

or older, and many of them require assistance navigating benefits (e.g., long-term health care, aid and assistance programs, burial benefits, etc.) and managing everyday life.¹³ Family members often become primary caregivers for aging veterans. According to the Blue Star Families survey, 37 percent of respondents provide care to a veteran parent or grandparent.¹⁴ It is particularly important to build support structures for these families and caregivers to effectively care for the veteran.

Aging Veterans and Support Systems

AGING VETERANS¹



46%

of the total veteran population is **AGE 65 OR OLDER**¹

Considerations for Aging Veterans

4 in 5 Vietnam theater veterans report **chronic PTSD symptoms** 20-25 years after Vietnam War²

9.4 million veterans receive Social Security benefits; **3.6 million are elderly** (the majority are 80 years or older)³

Increased lifespan for aging veterans will significantly impact the need for **VA benefits and healthcare services**⁴

Key Benefits for Aging Veterans⁵

Aid and Assistance and Housebound monthly pension benefits

Long term and extended health care (including geriatrics, nursing home and residential care, etc.)

Caregiver programs

Cemetery services and burial benefits

SPOUSES AND CAREGIVERS FOR ALL VETERANS

*"Six in ten caregivers report their own health has worsened because of caregiving."*⁹

*"Caregivers for PTSD-diagnosed veterans tend to take on a bigger share of household tasks such as paying bills or housework. They also do more taking care of children and the extended family."*¹⁰

15M

spouses support veterans across all ages⁶

275K-1M

men and women care or have previously cared for wounded, ill, or injured service members and veterans⁷

37%

of BSF Survey takers provide care to a veteran parent or grandparent⁸

96%

of caregivers are estimated to be women⁷

MILITARY FAMILIES

Family fulfills a central role while an individual is in active duty. Families are often the primary support system for service members and act as the bridge between the military and civilian worlds. Many recognize military service as a family-wide service—60 percent of the nearly 2 million active duty service members are married and/or have children.¹⁵ Yet 90 percent of military families feel the general public does not understand the sacrifices they and their service members have made.¹⁶

Active duty military families navigate unique circumstances as a result of military life:¹⁷

- **High rates of mobility and separation:** On average, military families are seven times more likely to move than civilian families. Military families also experience frequent and often long-term separation from their loved one due to deployment or training. This can erode familial stability, resulting in single-parent households as the norm and amplifying emotional needs for children.
- **Low levels of spousal employment:** High mobility can inhibit a spouse's ability to pursue and maintain employment in a meaningful career path. Despite being a highly skilled and well-educated population, 90 percent of female military spouses report being underemployed with respect to their education and experience.¹⁸ These challenges mean many military families must meet their needs on a single income.
- **Obstacles to financial security:** The uncertainty associated with military life—high mobility, inability to secure employment, moving costs, childcare, and changing benefits—can exacerbate financial instability and limit retirement planning.
- **Difficulty accessing childcare services:** A majority of military families have young children and a great need for childcare.¹⁹ However, many struggle to find childcare services that are both adequate and economical, putting a strain on the family and on the budget. Fifty-three percent of military spouses were significantly impacted and/or did not pursue education or employment because of lack of childcare availability.²⁰

ASSETS

When determining the best way to engage and support veterans and military families, museums and libraries should take note of the strong assets that veterans and military families offer.²¹



STRONG TEAM ORIENTATION

*"For many veterans, teamwork is an emphasis. There is **a desire to work as a team** and give people a sense of belonging and connection."*

– Veteran



HIGHLY SKILLED, RESOURCEFUL, AND INDEPENDENT

*"This is an **incredibly strong, capable, and resilient population** — not a group of people to feel sorry for. We want to support them because of the sacrifices they've made."*

– Veteran



SKILLED MILITARY SPOUSE WORKFORCE

*"Nearly 60 percent of military spouses (with an active-duty spouse) have a **bachelor's degree or master's degree.**"*

– Institute for Veterans and Military Families



INTEREST IN VOLUNTEERING

*"Sixty-five percent of **military family members volunteered** in their communities or military installations."*

– BSF Annual Survey



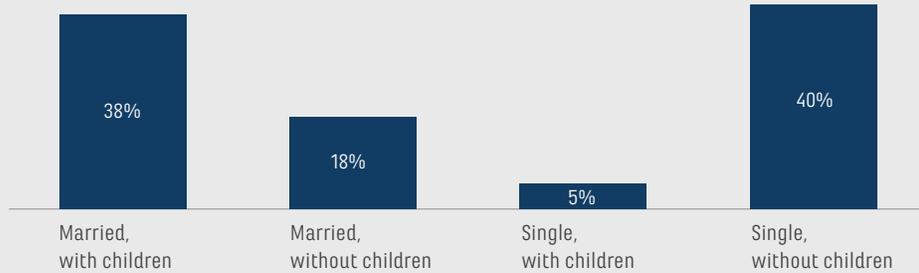
STRONG FAMILY ORIENTATION AND RESILIENCE

*"[Military families] **want to spend time together as a family**, increasing their own bonds and spending time with their communities."*

– Museum programs coordinator

Active-Duty Military Family Lifestyle

ACTIVE-DUTY MEMBER FAMILY AND PARENTAL STATUS, 2014⁴



High Rates of Mobility and Separation

Military families experience **frequent and long-term periods of separation** from their service member¹

Families report moving **three or more times** in a given year¹

On average, they are **seven times more likely** to move than civilian families¹

44% of veterans report that their deployments **hurt relationships** with their children¹

Obstacles to Financial Security

Uncertainty in military life—high mobility, inability to secure employment, moving costs, childcare and changing benefits—exacerbate financial instability¹ and can limit retirement planning

73% incurred **unexpected costs** as a result of the military lifestyle¹

45% of military families **do not feel confident** they will receive post-retirement health care, disability [41%], and pension [33%] benefits¹

Low Levels of Spousal Employment

75% of spouses feel that being a military spouse had a **negative impact** on their ability to pursue and maintain employment¹

Military spouses tend to make **38% less** than their civilian counterparts³

62% encountered challenges because of **geographic relocation** when obtaining employment licensing¹

68% of non-employed spouses and their families report **stress** from their current financial situation¹

Difficulty Accessing Child Services

77% of respondents (with children) to the BSF Annual Survey have children **under 12 years old** and have a **greater need** for childcare¹

35% of families **struggled** to find childcare for their children and **27%** spent **more than \$500/month** on childcare¹

53% of military spouses were **significantly impacted and/or did not** pursue education or employment because of childcare availability¹

Homeschooling rate for military children is **more than double** that of the general U.S. population¹

CONCLUSION

Remember that local context is important and the veteran and military family population will not look the same in all communities. Use this overview as a starting point to

discover what is unique to your local military context and how your library or museum is best able to contribute within your community.

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](#).
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FIGURE ENDNOTES

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