

Narrative

Need

Illinois Joining Forces was established to explore innovative methodologies and practices to solve pervasive issues in the veteran community. Just a few years ago, the generally accepted best practices leaned towards creating collective impact models that established coordinating organizations like IJF. The concept proposed that the coordinating authority would assess available existing community resources and facilitate interagency collaboration among public and private resources to best serve the needs of veterans.

Currently, collaboration between public, private, and non-profit organizations serving veterans and military families is on a remarkable rise. Organizations and their leaders increasingly see value in combining efforts to better serve our nation's veterans, which is encouraging. This development, in part, may be viewed in light of recent calls for greater collaboration across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to advance veteran and military family the greater emphasis on collaboration also reflects a larger public governance trend over the last two decades to use coordinated multi-institutional and multi-actor arrangements to address complex social problems that exceed the capacity of individual organizations.

However, surveys among veterans and military families still note a lack of universally accepted methods for connecting with these communities based resources and there are still challenges in creating trust among local resources to connect veterans to the best resources to create outcomes. As Illinois Joining Forces embarked to build collective impact among the rich collection of resources in Northern Illinois there were notable data points that necessitated further evaluation:

- There needs to be an incentive for veteran service providers to seek and engage in collaboration.
- The needs of veterans within each community are different within a state, county, municipality and the assets available to address those needs should be understood by the coordinating agency.
- Resources extend beyond public and private organizations that are specifically focused on “veteran” issues. Similarly, the contact points that veterans choose to engage when in need vary widely based on their individual level of comfort, geography, and trust. This broadens collective impact to include non-traditional resources like libraries, museums, faith-based institutions, schools, etc.
- Long term, sustainable, local funding supports existing organizations and allows greater outcomes to be achieved through innovative programs that address a specific need.
- Outreach and promotion of successes so that the community knows and embraces the organizations that are providing impact.

Asset Based Community Development

One popular practice for beginning a needs assessment in a community is engaging in asset-based community development. Asset-based community development (ABCD) is a methodology for the sustainable development of communities based on their strengths and potentials. It involves assessing the resources, skills, and experience available in a community; organizing the community around issues that move its members into action; and then determining and taking appropriate action.

The ABCD approach was developed by John L. McKnight and John P. Kretzmann at the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois in 1993.

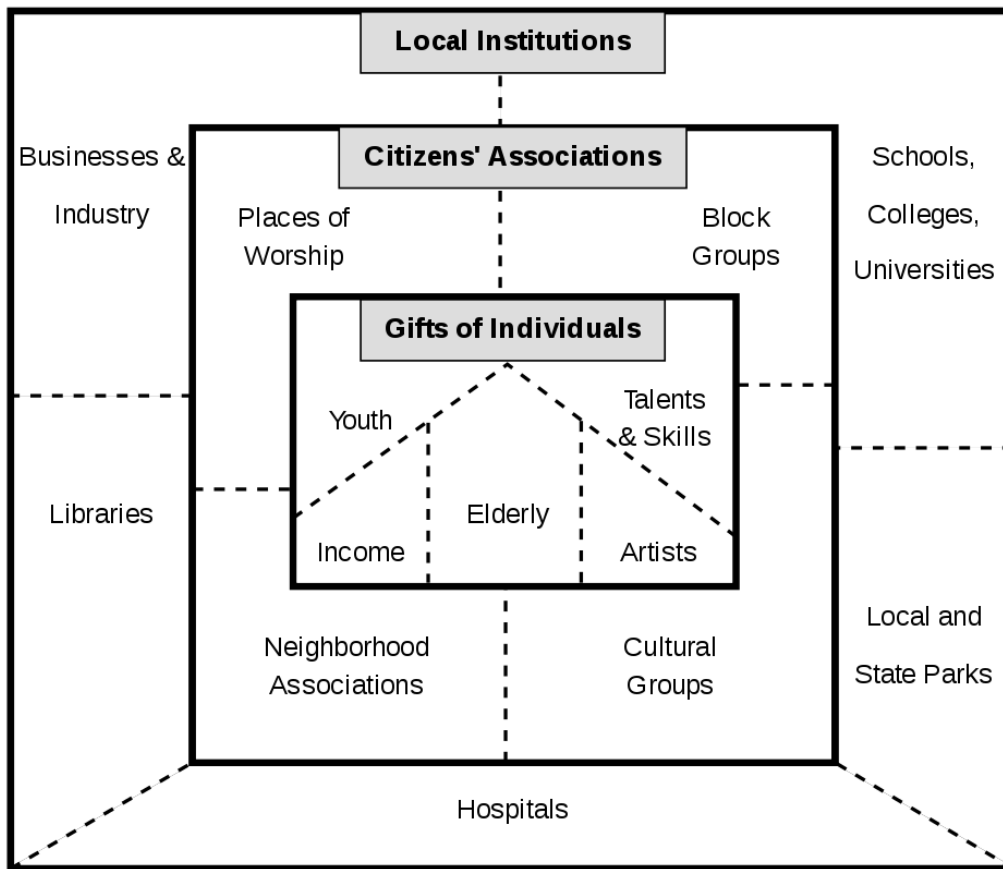
The ABCD approach utilizes several tools to assess and mobilize communities.

Capacity inventory

- 1 Skills Information: lists the many skills that a person has gained at home, work, in the community, or elsewhere. Examples of these skills can include internet knowledge, hair-cutting, listening, wallpapering, carpentry, sewing, babysitting, etc.
- 2 Community Skills: lists the community work in which a person has participated to determine future work they may be interested in.
- 3 Enterprising Interests and Experience: lists past experience in business and determines interest in starting a business.
- 4 Personal Information: lists minimum information for follow-up.

Asset mapping

There are five key assets in any given community: individuals, associations, institutions, physical assets, and connections. These assets are broken down into three categories: Gifts of individuals, Citizens' Associations, and Local Institutions. Asset maps are used in lieu of needs maps which focus solely on negative aspects of communities. Asset maps, on the other hand, focus on community assets, abilities, skills, and strengths in order to build its future.



Time banks

Time Banks are an example of using community assets to connect individuals' assets to one another. Neighbors and local organizations share skills with one another and earn and spend 'Time Bank Hours' or 'credits' in the process, allowing an hour of child care to equal an hour of home repair or tax preparation.

Partnerships and Networking

What is implied in the explanation and narrative of ABCD is that locally based assets must be connected and engaged in joint ventures or partnerships that are mutually beneficial with the end goal to achieve outcomes for the veterans. In many cases, the greatest challenge to collaboration is an abundance of resources. In rural communities, where resources are scarce, the opportunity to create favorable outcomes for veterans by working together is more common than when numerous, like resources are available. Scarcity creates the need for innovation and creativity which often leads to collaboration.

In rural communities, scarcity of resources (financial and otherwise) is often the norm. Providing information and direction to veterans can fall to the scarce resources within a community. For this reason, libraries, archives, museums, hospitals, and faith based

institutions can become the default primary resource for veterans and their families. The transient nature of military families often brings families to communities where there does not exist an established coordinating agency like Illinois Joining Forces. However, the needs for services are often the same as in a major municipality (legal, emergency financial assistance, benefits information, housing, employment, mental health counseling, etc.)

Developing strong partnerships with existing library networks affords the veteran community a vast network of information. The needs of veterans and military families can be unique due to sustained deployments, the hidden wounds of war, and a complex system of government benefits eligibility. For LAMs, connecting with regionally based partners like IJF through the Veteran Support Communities relieves the anxiety of searching for solutions in an area where many library professionals may have little to no experience.

Impact

The success of the Veteran Support Communities model will lie on Illinois Joining Forces' ability to effectively execute on the core principles of Collective Impact. Successful collective impact initiatives typically have five conditions that together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations.

Common Agenda Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. Organizations that serve veterans often have a slightly different definition of the problem and the ultimate goal than their peers. These differences are easily ignored when organizations work independently on isolated initiatives, yet these differences splinter the efforts and undermine the impact of the field as a whole. Sometimes the differences are mischaracterized as an organization's "niche" in their mission or geography.

Collective impact requires that these differences be discussed and resolved. Every participant need not agree with every other participant on all dimensions of the problem. In fact, disagreements continue to divide participants in all of our examples of collective impact. All participants must agree, however, on the primary goals for the collective impact initiative as a whole. Connecting veterans with resources in the community to address their needs will be the primary goal of the partnership between Illinois Library Association, Illinois Joining Forces, and Veteran Service Organizations.

Shared Measurement Systems Developing a shared measurement system is essential to collective impact. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it

also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures.

It may seem impossible to evaluate hundreds of different organizations on the same set of measures. Yet recent advances in Web-based technologies have enabled common systems for reporting performance and measuring outcomes. These systems increase efficiency and reduce cost. They can also improve the quality and credibility of the data collected, increase effectiveness by enabling grantees to learn from each other's performance, and document the progress of the field as a whole. Consultants and partners funded by the IMLS grant will focus on developing the data resources that can be easily accessed and shared among libraries in every community within Illinois and throughout the networks nationally that those libraries are connected to.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities Collective impact initiatives depend on a diverse group of stakeholders working together, not by requiring that all participants do the same thing, but by encouraging each participant to undertake the specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others.

The power of collective action comes not from the sheer number of participants or the uniformity of their efforts, but from the coordination of their differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action. Each stakeholder's efforts must fit into an overarching plan if their combined efforts are to succeed. The multiple causes of social problems, and the components of their solutions, are interdependent. They cannot be addressed by uncoordinated actions among isolated organizations. For this reason, vetting organizations that participate in the network is essential. The credibility of the shared network depends on trust among the coordinating agency and the individual members. That exclusivity must come with some reward for creating favorable outcomes. Something akin to "preferred provider" or IJF "gold" member.

Continuous Communication Developing trust among nonprofits, corporations, and government agencies is a monumental challenge. Participants need several years of regular meetings to build up enough experience with each other to recognize and appreciate the common motivation behind their different efforts. They need time to see that their own interests will be treated fairly, and that decisions will be made on the basis of objective evidence and the best possible solution to the problem, not to favor the priorities of one organization over another.

Even the process of creating a common vocabulary takes time, and it is an essential prerequisite to developing shared measurement systems. Monthly and quarterly meetings with various levels of stakeholders will be implemented with leadership meetings occurring separately. Events that support a Veteran Support Community at its inception and during its growth stages will be critical to building trust and collaboration among resources within a community. At each stage the community should feel like they are self-supported and sustaining and that the coordinating agency (like IJF) is available for support, networking, and data.

Backbone Support Organizations Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. Coordination takes time, and none of the participating organizations has any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.

The backbone organization requires a dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly.

Project Design

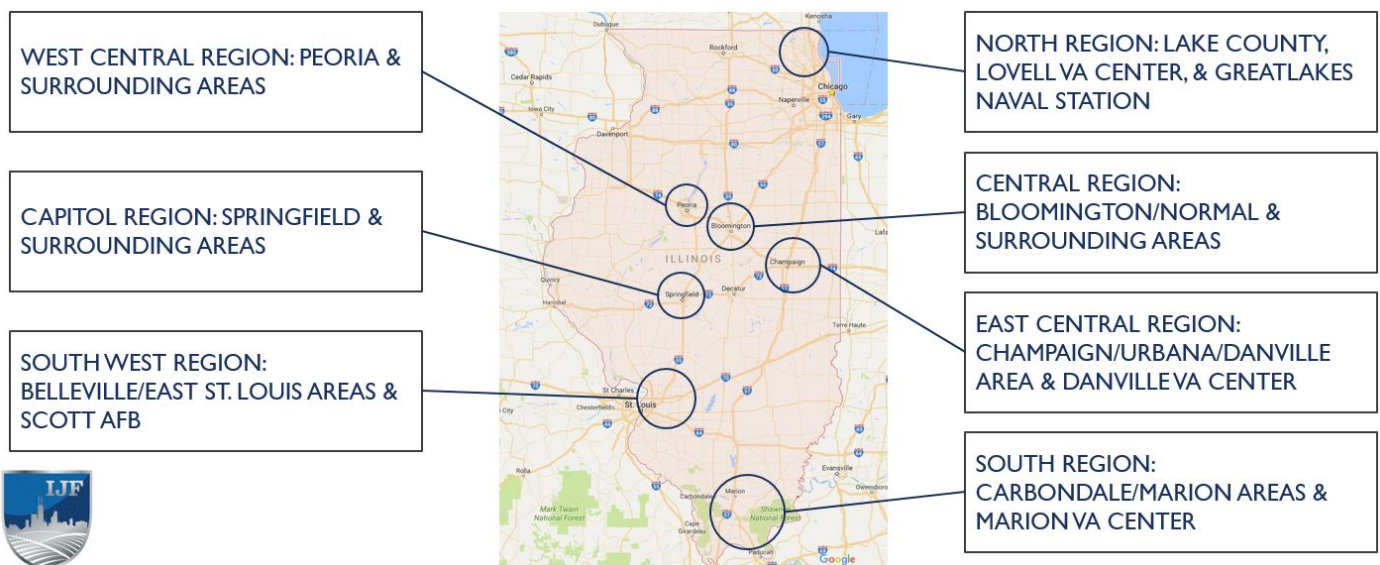
OVERVIEW

1. Project Background and Description

The purpose of initiative is to develop local Veteran support communities by bringing together local Veteran resource providers and other community assets. In doing so, the initiative will help to more efficiently and effectively meet the needs of Service members, Veterans and their Families (SMVF) locally throughout the state of Illinois.

2. Project Scope

Phase 1: Identify Target Communities – 7 Geographic Regions or Hubs (see below) have been selected to start based on the density of the Veteran population in those regions (3 Regions



coincide with the strategy of MyVA Communities surrounding VA Hospitals and our intention is to collaborate in their community building efforts).

Phase 2: *Reconnaissance* – Using a method known as Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), a thorough environmental scan/asset inventory of each region will be conducted to identify the existing community resource assets prior to the launching of Phase 3.

Phase 3: *Community Event* – As a means of bringing the community together, an invitation-only Veteran Special Event will be planned and executed and will include co-sponsorship by selected, local Veteran-focused organizations to foster ownership of the initiative from day one. The event will include a featured speaker (e.g., Medal of Honor recipient), subject matter experts on relevant Veteran-centric topics, a briefing from IJF on the Veteran Community Support Initiative which will include a sign-up process for interested parties to attend an invitation-only follow-on event a month later (Phase 4).

Phase 4: *IJF Veteran Support Community Initiative Kick-off and Strategy Session* – One month from the initial Community Event, a strategy session will be hosted and facilitated by IJF to discuss the need for greater collaboration between existing organizations in the community. We will begin to identify the community members who can provide future leadership, guidance, and sustainability to the initiative.

Strategy Session Outline:

1. Layout the vision for the IJF Veteran Support Community Initiative
2. Introduce existing partnerships: Egan Center at DePaul University, University of Illinois at Springfield – GIS Lab, MyVA Communities
3. Community Input – Ask for consensus and explore ways for better collaboration

Initial objectives:

1. Develop and share the database of Veteran community resources (Environmental Scan)
2. Create a collaborative environment for a more effective referral and service delivery process
3. Identify GAPS in services by service type and geography

Phase 5: *Grow Community Resource Database and Continue to Meet Quarterly* – The Veteran Support Community organizations are free to meet as often as is practicable, but IJF is committed to attending each of the 7 Hubs meetings on a quarterly basis.

3. Partners in Progress

IJF has identified several strong strategic partners with whom we intend to collaborate to establish and grow the IJF Veteran Support Communities. Other strategic alliances are being established including the leadership at the state level from the VFW, American Legion, AMVETS, The Order of the Purple Heart, and Vietnam Veterans of America and others.

The strategic partner relationships include the following:

- *MyVA Communities* – **Status as of 27 March:** Established working relationship with Lynette Taylor, Relationship Manager, MyVA Communities for Illinois and Indiana. Ms. Taylor is targeting the communities centered around the 5 VA Hospitals in Illinois. In these communities, IJF will collaborate with MyVA Communities to share resources, contacts and community assets to establish the IJF Veteran Support Community.
- *University of Illinois at Springfield, GIS Lab* – **Status as of 27 March:** Established Working relationship awaiting Affiliation Agreement – The GIS Lab has agreed in principle to partner with IJF to assist in building out a robust Veteran Resource Knowledgebase (an Enterprise Geodatabase) designed to capture, maintain, update and access the most comprehensive statewide repository of Veteran-serving organizations and resources.
- *DePaul University, Egan Office for Urban Education & Community Partnerships (UECP)* – **Status as of 27 March:** Continuing to build on the strong working relationship with IJF staff and the Egan Office and their Multi-Faith Veterans Program. The UECP utilizes and trains others to use the ABCD (Asset Based Community Development) approach to building strong, sustainable, collaborative networks to meet community needs. We believe this ‘advance work’ is the key to bringing communities together for a common purpose – ours being the delivery of much-needed services and support to the SMVF community in Illinois. We intend to nurture this relationship into a fully functional partnership expeditiously.

4. Implementation Plan

Step 1: Meet with the Egan Office and MVP staff to solidify our partnership and map out a plan to perform an environmental scan of the North Region (Lake & McHenry Counties, specifically the Waukegan, North Chicago and Zion communities). This coincides with our existing plan with MyVA Communities to establish a community-based resource hub in the North Region. Our existing IJF member, Lake County Veterans and Family Services Foundation (LCVFSF), is a mature partner organization in that community and has been briefed on the strategy along with the leadership at Lake & McHenry County VAC. Each has expressed considerable interest in collaborating with IJF and MyVA Communities in this effort.

Step 2: Begin planning for a Community Event (Phase 3, above) to be held in the Spring of 2017. Follow-up Kick-off and Strategy Session (Phase 4) to be held in late Spring.

Step 3: Concurrent with Step 2, begin ABCD/Recon in the next region (SW Region, tentatively)

Illinois Joining Forces

Step 4: Repeat the process of ABCD, event planning, team building for the remaining Regions in the state with the goal of establishing all 7 regional Veteran Support Communities by the end of 2017.

Opportunities with the Environmental Protection Agency

Illinois Joining Forces is interested in being considered for EPA Building Blocks technical assistance.

5. Illinois Veteran Population Density

